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# STUDY PROJECT

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## BATTLEFIELD TERRAIN STUDY: BURNSIDE'S ATTACK AGAINST THE CONFEDERATE RIGHT AT ANTIETAM

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN D. FULLER, IN

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accounts from officers and soldiers from both sides give the reader a vivid description of actions as they occurred throughout the day which are best viewed from each of the vantage points. At the conclusion of the study the author analyzes the battle in accordance with the principles of war and provides his insights as to the relevance of the lessons learned from this phase of the battle to modern war.

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

BATTLEFIELD TERRAIN STUDY: BURNSIDE'S ATTACK  
AGAINST THE CONFEDERATE RIGHT AT ANTIETAM

INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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15 May 1985

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# ABSTRACT

**AUTHOR(S):** John D. Fuller, LTC, IN

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The study project is a historical terrain walk of that portion of the Antietam Battlefield over which the Union Ninth Corps, commanded by Major General Ambrose Burnside, attacked the right flank of the Confederate force commanded by General Robert E. Lee. The terrain study guides the reader to nine key vantage points on the battlefield. At these vantage points (stops) the reader is provided with excerpts from official reports, regimental histories, diaries, letters and manuscripts from participants in the battle. These first hand accounts from officers and soldiers from both sides give the reader a vivid description of actions as they occurred throughout the day which are best viewed from each of the vantage points. At the conclusion of the study the author analyzes the battle in accordance with the principles of war and provides his insights as to the relevance of the lessons learned from this phase of the battle to modern war.

## PREFACE

The Individual Study Project was produced under the aegis of the United States Army War College. The scope and general methodology were outlined by Professor Mortin J. Luvaas. This historical battlefield terrain study is designed to support a larger effort, a compendium of several terrain studies of other Civil War battlefields. The author opted to participate in the study based on his interest in Civil War history and the proximity to the Antietam battlefield to his parents' home in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. The outstanding and critical assistance of the author's father, Kenneth C. Fuller, was a major factor in the successful completion of this project.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

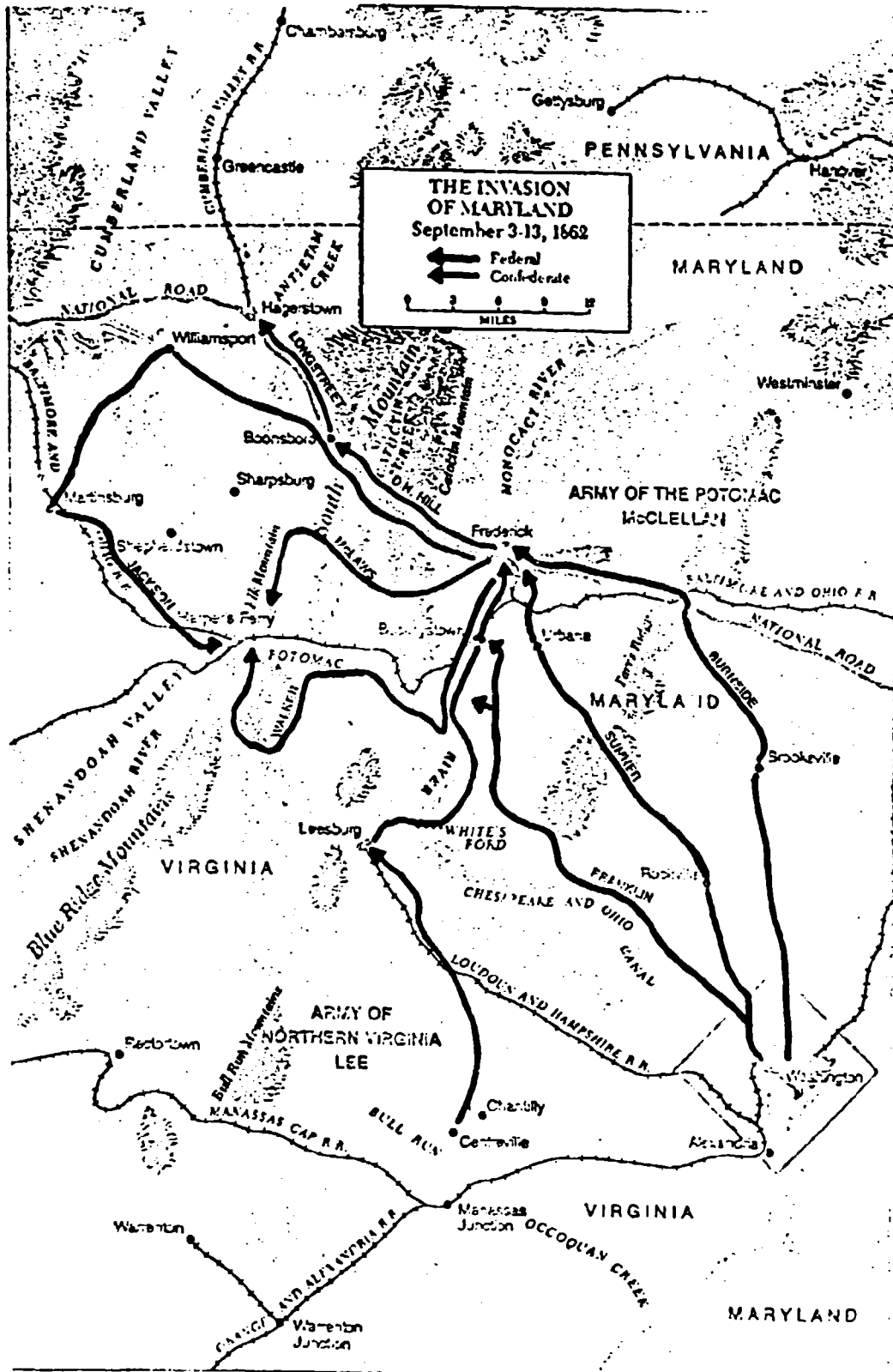
The Battle of Antietam was unquestionably the bloodiest battle in the annals of American military history. On that single day, the seventeenth of September 1862, the official records indicate that 23,110 American soldiers from both the North and South were either wounded or killed. While tactically indecisive, it was a clear operational and strategic defeat for the south and the Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, Robert E. Lee.

The battle itself evolved into three major phases. The first focused on Hooker's and Mansfield's attack in the north against Lee's left flank. This phase lasted from 6:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m., and has been characterized by actions in and around the cornfield and the north, east and west woods. The second phase lasted from 9:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and is associated with attacks against Lee's center. This phase of the battle became most prominently known for the carnage at "Bloody Lane". The third and final phase took place from 1:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Its most celebrated aspects have been the attack on Burnside's Bridge and the last minute counterattack by Major General A. P. Hill's Light Division against the Ninth Corps' left flank.

It is this last phase of the battle with which this walking tour is concerned. The purpose of the tour is to guide the reader over the most significant aspects of the terrain as contested by Union and Confederate forces. Only official records and eyewitness accounts will be used to recreate the battle. At the end of the tour I have included my personal insights concerning the tactics employed by both sides. These insights are presented by comparing Union and Confederate actions throughout the battle

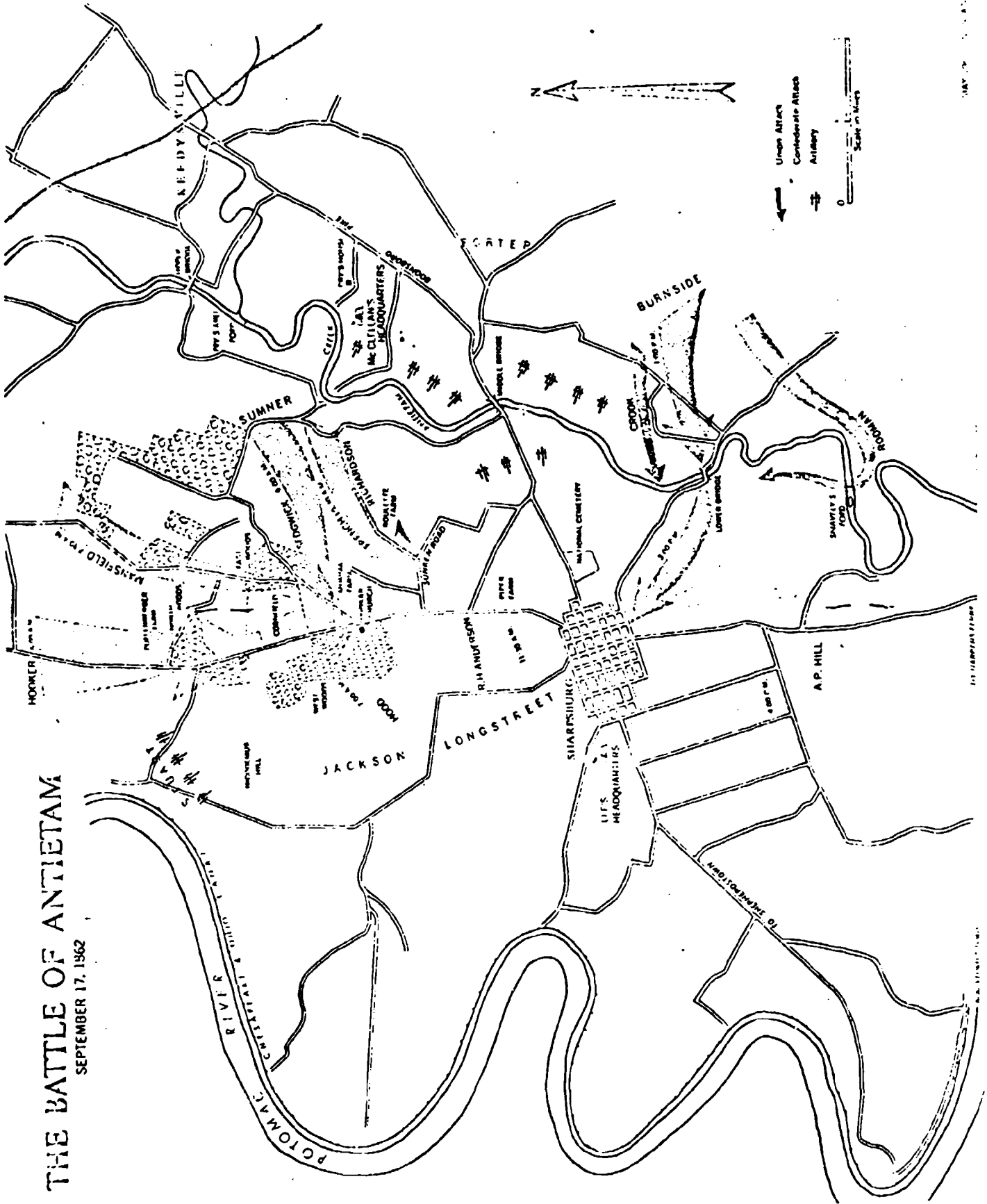
against the principles of war now included in the operational doctrine of the United States Army.

# GENERAL MAPS



# THE BATTLE OF ANTIETAM

SEPTEMBER 17, 1862



## CHAPTER II

### OVERVIEW

#### Background

On 12 April 1861, Confederate artillery batteries surrounding Charleston Harbor opened fire on the Union forces occupying Fort Sumter, South Carolina. A Federal declaration of war which followed two days later marked the beginning of four bitter and agonizing years of civil war between the states of the North and South. Places which before the war were unknown to most Americans have been immortalized in our history books for the famous battles which took place nearby. Even today the towns of Gettysburg, Shiloh, Manassas and Chancellorsville are recognized for their place in Civil War history by grade school children throughout the country. But the bloodiest single day of battle occurred near Sharpsburg, Maryland on 17 September 1862. Known as the Battle of Antietam for the creek which meandered north to south and acted as a line of demarcation between Union and Confederate forces this battle was the strategic turning point of the war.

Until Antietam, the Confederacy had enjoyed one major battlefield success after another. In the eastern theater, Major General Thomas J. Jackson had humiliated Union forces in the Shenandoah Valley; General Irwin McDowell had been defeated in ignominious fashion at the Battle of Bull Run by Generals P. G. T. Beauregard and Joseph E. Johnston; and General Robert E. Lee had confused and outgeneraled Major General George B. McClellan during the Peninsular Campaign. More recently, General Lee had decisively defeated General John Pope's newly organized Army of Virginia at the Second Battle of Bull Run. Riding this tide of battlefield success, General Lee was confronted with the dilemma of deciding what to do next. Having served for a brief time at the outset of secession as President Davis' chief military advisor and nominal Secretary of War, Lee was well aware of the strategic and operational realities which would now determine his next move.

The North on the other hand had been in the war for more than a year and had yet to claim a major battlefied victory. Public confidence in the political and military leadership of the North was at a low ebb. The enormous resource advantage it maintained over the South had yet to be mobilized or even effectively organized. Lincoln himself lacked confidence in his military leadership and had failed to settle on a military commander to direct the war effort; e.g., first General Winfield Scott, then McClellan (who Lincoln believed after the Peninsular Campaign could not act simultaneously as the Army's General-in-Chief and the Commander of the Army of the Potomac) and finally Major General Henry W. Halleck. Moreover, Lincoln had not decided on a firm strategy for conducting the war. General Scott's Anaconda Plan which was characterized by a principle operational effort in the western theater had been overruled primarily for political reasons in favor of a far less decisive strategy of attacks on all fronts.



The second loss at Bull Run and the proximity of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia now posed an immediate threat to the nation's capital. The initiative in late August 1862 clearly rested with the South and the Army of Northern Virginia.

### STRATEGY

#### The South

The policy of the Confederacy through the Second Battle of Manassas had been to conduct a strategic defense. Such a policy was predicated on the hope that:

- A prolonged war would result in a rapid loss of popular support for the war and Lincoln, especially a war in which Union forces appeared incapable of achieving any significant battlefield victory.
- The major European nations would rapidly tire of the Union naval blockade, which effectively stopped shipments of Southern cotton to their textile industries, and thereby intervene on behalf of the Confederacy.
- And finally, Lincoln himself would soon tire of a war in which popular support was dwindling, his military leaders seemed incapable of winning and the resources required to run the war were staggering.

By the conclusion of Second Manassas it was clear, at least to Lee, that the policy of fighting a war characterized by a strategic defensive was no longer viable. All three of the assumptions above were proving invalid. While it was true that popular support for the war was declining in certain respects, there was also a growing resoluteness among many in the North who at that time saw the cause of maintaining the Union essential at any cost.

Lee believed that the Confederacy must now shift to the strategic offensive if the ultimate goal of Southern secession was to be achieved; e.g., independence. His rationale was based on the following factors:

- The Confederacy could not hope to win a protracted war with the Union. The Northern states, once their industrial and manpower potential was fully mobilized, would simply overwhelm their opponent over time through attrition. Consequently, if the Confederacy hoped to win it must do so before the North fully mobilized.
- European intervention could not be achieved unless the Confederacy could demonstrate the capability to win through offensive action. The reluctance of Great Britain and France to enter on either side emanated from the strategic stalemate which was evolving and the only way for the South to break that stalemate was to assume the offensive, strategically.

Many border states were not fully committed to either side and by assuming the strategic offensive the Confederacy could hopefully influence their future direction.

In the eastern theater the battles fought since the inception of the war had been fought on Confederate soil. It was now becoming increasingly difficult to support the Army of Northern Virginia on ravaged and over-foraged land. Lee literally needed greener pastures to nurture his Army.

- Finally, Lee believed that if he took the war to the enemy's soil this would help hasten the decline of Northern popular support for the war effort and force the Union Army away from its Washington sanctuary before it had reorganized and trained its new recruits.

### The North

At the end of Second Manassas, the North also had to reassess its strategic direction. Clearly each of the major campaigns in the east which had been mounted against the Confederate forces had failed. The capital was now threatened more so than ever before by Lee's victorious Army of Northern Virginia, which had forced the Army of the Potomac back behind the fortifications of Washington. For the first time the strategic initiative rested with the Confederacy.

Frankly, to infer that the North had a strategy before Second Manassas or immediately thereafter gives the North far more credit than it rightfully deserves.

Scott's Anaconda Plan which had been developed shortly after the war began had not been adopted. The North had consequently directed its efforts toward a series of uncoordinated campaigns with the only observable goal being the Confederacy's capital at Richmond. But, Richmond was not, as Clausewitz would maintain, the South's center of gravity. In fact, Richmond was selected as the seat of Confederate government, after Montgomery, Alabama, only to appease and strengthen the commitment of the South's most politically potent state - Virginia. The South's center of gravity was clearly her army. It was not until U. S. Grant was made General-in-Chief that the Union concentrated its effort on the proper strategic center of gravity.

But, following Second Manassas the combined Union Armies (Pope's and McClellan's) were simply incapable of maintaining the strategic offensive. The essential tasks facing McClellan were all defensive in nature:

- Improve the fortifications surrounding the District of Columbia, and
- Protect against an invasion into northern territory by Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

The tasks confronting Major General McClellan dictated that he adopt a defensive posture. While Lincoln may have viewed this new direction as only a brief respite from the strategic offensive, it nonetheless permitted Lee to initiate his offensive campaign unchallenged.

## THE CAMPAIGN

### The South

To accomplish his strategic objective, Lee adopted a very ambitious and risky operational plan. His analysis of the situation indicated that the best and most effective course of action was to cross the Potomac and advance into Maryland. In so doing he avoided the strongest defenses of Washington which were oriented to the south and made more believable his threat to the Union capital by moving his forces against its most vulnerable flank. His intent was not to assail the fortifications of Washington, but to force the Army of the Potomac from its strongpoint where he could "annoy and harass the enemy."<sup>1</sup>

General Lee outlined his rationale for the proposed campaign in a letter to President Jefferson Davis on 3 September:

"The two grand armies of the United States that have been operating in Virginia, though now united, are much weakened and demoralized. Their new levies, of which I understand 60,000 men have already been posted in Washington, are not yet organized, and will take some time to prepare for the field. If it is ever desired to give material aid to Maryland and afford her an opportunity of throwing off the oppression to which she is now subject, this would seem the most favorable.

After the enemy had disappeared from the vicinity of Fairfax Court House and taken the road to Alexandria and Washington, I did not think it would be advantageous to follow him farther. I had no intention of attacking him in his fortifications, and am not prepared to invest them . . . I therefore determined . . . if found practicable—to cross into Maryland.

The purpose, if discovered, will have the effect of carrying the enemy north of the Potomac and, if prevented, will not result in much evil.

The Army is not properly equipped for an invasion of an enemy's territory. It lacks much of the material of war, is feeble in transportation, the animals being much reduced, and the men are poorly provided with clothes, and in thousands of instances are destitute of shoes. Still we cannot afford to be idle, and though weaker than our opponents in men and military equipments,

must endeavor to harass if we cannot destroy them. I am aware that the movement is attended with much risk, yet I do not consider success impossible, and I shall endeavor to guard it from loss . . .<sup>2</sup>

In short, Lee's initial campaign plan called for advancing into Maryland and then moving to occupy Frederick. This movement, he anticipated, would serve two purposes: first, draw McClellan's Army away from its fortifications and second, force the evacuation of threatened Union garrisons along his line of communication with Richmond. Additionally, Lee saw the opportunity to strengthen his force on the bounty available throughout western Maryland. General Longstreet recounted Lee's beliefs in regard to the latter in this manner.

"The commercial, social, and blood ties of Maryland inclined her people to the Southern cause. A little way north of the Potomac were inviting fields of food and supplies more plentiful than on the southern side; and the fields for march and maneuver strategy and tactics, were even more inviting than the broad fields of grain and comfortable pasture-lands. Propitious also was the prospect of swelling our ranks by Maryland recruits."<sup>3</sup>

The final phase of Lee's evolving campaign plan was flexible. Upon strengthening his army in Maryland, Lee then saw the opportunity to move north toward Harrisburg and cut off the east-west railway connecting the industrial northeast with the western theater or moving on, Baltimore, thereby encircling and further threatening the Union capital. In either event, Lee saw the Maryland campaign as a significant risk worth taking in view of the potential strategic advances to be gained.

However, Lee did not count on the Harpers Ferry garrison remaining in place. He had assumed that, once threatened and cut off by the Army of Northern Virginia, General McClellan would order them to abandon their position. Lee was right to have believed this would be McClellan's reaction but McClellan was no longer General-in-Chief. General Halleck had replaced him and ordered the Union forces to remain.

The availability of sizable stores of equipment, clothing and supplies at Harpers Ferry was a prize which Lee could not overlook, not to mention the threat posed by a 10,000 man Union force sitting astride his primary line of communication. Lee believed he had sufficient time to reduce the Harpers Ferry garrison and at the same time delay and further attrite McClellan's Army of the Potomac.

Therefore, on 9 September 1862, Lee issued the now famous Special Order 191 which directed General Jackson to advance rapidly against the Union forces at Harpers Ferry. Jackson's force comprised the preponderance of the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee's change in operational plan was described by Brigadier General Cox following the war.

"He had abandoned his plan of moving further northward, and had chosen a line bringing him into surer communication with Jackson. His movements before the battle of South Mountain revealed a purpose of invasion identical with that which he tried to carry out in 1863 in the Gettysburg campaign. Longstreet, with two divisions and a brigade (D. R. Jones, Hood, and Evans), had advanced to Hagerstown, and it seems that a large part of the Confederate trains reached there also. D. H. Hill's division held Boonsboro and the passes of South Mountain at Turner's and Fox's Gaps. McLaws invested our fortifications on Maryland Heights, supported by R. H. Anderson's division. Jackson, with four divisions (A. P. Hill, Ewell, and Starke of his own corps, with Walker temporarily reporting to him), was besieging Harpers Ferry."<sup>4</sup>

There is no reason to think that Lee could not have successfully pulled off this exceptionally risky division of his force given McClellan's well-known caution if it were not for what Clausewitz termed the "friction" of war.

Somehow the copy of Special Order 191, which was intended for General D. H. Hill, was lost. It is one of the ironies of warfare that the order was found by Union soldiers, brought quickly to General McClellan and recognized as a true copy. When Lee discovered McClellan knew his plan for the next phase of the campaign, he had to choose among the obvious alternatives of: abandoning the Maryland campaign altogether and retreating back to Virginia; continuing his attack on Harpers Ferry and moving to position his force from being divided by McClellan; or continuing as planned while maintaining the flexibility to rapidly reverse course if necessary. He chose the latter as explained by General Cox:

"If McClellan's force should prove overwhelming, the past experience of the Confederate general encouraged him to believe that our advance would not be so enterprising that he could not make a safe retreat into Virginia. He resolved therefore to halt at Sharpsburg, which offered an excellent field for a defensive battle, leaving himself free to resume his aggressive campaign or to retreat into Virginia according to the result."<sup>5</sup>

The order that Lee dispatched to his subordinate commanders outlining the new phase in the campaign plan is included here.

"HEADQUARTERS ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA,

September 9, 1862.

Special Orders)

No. 191 }

The army will resume its march to-morrow, taking the Hagerstown road. Jackson's command will form the advance and, after passing Middletown, with such portion as he may select, take the route toward Sharpsburg, cross the Potomac at the most convenient point, and, by Friday night, take possession of the B. and O. R. R., capture such of the enemy as may be at Martinsburg, and intercept such as may attempt to escape from Harpers Ferry.

General Longstreet's command will pursue the same road as far as Boonesborough, where it will halt with the reserve, supply and baggage trains of the army. General McLaws, with his own division and that of General R. H. Anderson, will follow General Longstreet. On reaching Middletown he will take the route to Harpers Ferry, and by Friday morning possess himself of the Maryland Heights, and endeavor to capture the enemy at Harpers Ferry and vicinity.

General Walker, with his division, after accomplishing the object in which he is now engaged, will cross the Potomac at Cheek's Ford, ascend its right bank to Lovettsville, take possession of the Loudon Heights, if practicable by Friday morning. Key's Ford on his left, and the road between the end of the mountain and the Potomac on his right. He will, as far as practicable, co-operate with General McLaws and General Jackson in intercepting the retreat of the enemy. General D. H. Hill's division will form the rear guard of the army, pursuing the road taken by the main body. The reserve artillery, ordnance, supply trains, etc., will precede General Hill.

General Stuart will detach a squadron of cavalry to accompany the commands of Generals Longstreet, Jackson, and McLaws, and, with the main body of

the cavalry, will cover the route of the army and bring up all stragglers that may have been left behind.

The commands of Generals Jackson, McLaws, and Walker, after accomplishing the objects for which they have been detached, will join the main body of the Army at Boonesborough or Hagerstown. Each regiment on the march will habitually carry its axes in the regimental ordnance wagons, for use of the men at their encampments to procure wood, etc.

By command of GENERAL R. E. LEE;  
R. H. CHILTON,  
Assistant-Adjutant-General.

MAJ.-GEN. D. H. Hill  
Commanding Division."6

### The North

McClellan's campaign plan was initially limited. Until he could find and fix his enemy he certainly could not fight him. So, McClellan's initial plan, although not stated in this manner, was an advance to contact. It was conducted on a sufficiently broad front to protect Washington and yet each of his Army's three advancing columns were within reasonable reinforcing march times. It can be assumed, although the records fail to provide a detailed campaign outline, that McClellan would launch into the next phase of the campaign once contact with the bulk of Lee's forces was made.

"In its general advance, the Army of the Potomac was divided into three columns; the right, under General Burnside, was composed of the 1st and 9th Army Corps and Cox's Kanawha Division from West Virginia; the centre, under General Sumner, was composed of the 2nd and 12th Army Corps; while the left, under General Franklin, was composed of the 6th Army Corps, to which was attached General Couch's division of the 4th Corps; the 5th Army Corps, and a small artillery reserve, which did not leave Washington until the 12th of September, constituted an independent command."7

Even when, by 13 September, Pleasonton's Cavalry had made contact with the Army of Northern Virginia and determined that Lee had divided his army with Jackson marching toward Harpers Ferry and Longstreet toward Hagerstown, McClellan could not settle on his next course of action. He was still fearful of a move by Lee to reverse his march and circumvent his left flank south of the Potomac - a fear totally unrealistic and fueled by General Halleck. Furthermore, Governor Curtin of Pennsylvania was making strong protestations

that Lee's objective was Harrisburg and McClellan needed to move to protect his state. These fears were further exacerbated by totally unreliable intelligence estimates of the Confederate strength provided both by Pinkerton's detectives and Pleasonton's cavalry. The discovery of Special Order 191 on 13 September, changed McClellan's uncertainty in a dramatic way. Bruce Catton described McClellan's situation as follows:

"On the evening of September 13 his opportunity was wide open.

Lee himself was near Hagerstown, Maryland, with Longstreet and nine brigades. Five more brigades, under D. H. Hill, were twelve miles south of Hagerstown, at Boonsboro, a few miles west of Turner's Gap where the National Road crossed South Mountain. All the rest of the army, divided into three separate columns, was off to the south, converging on Harpers Ferry under the direction of Stonewall Jackson, and two of these three columns were south of the Potomac. Lee's army of invasion had split into pieces like an exploding shell, and the Army of the Potomac, massed in and near Frederick, Maryland, was ideally situated to exploit this situation. No Civil War general was ever given so fair a chance to destroy the opposing army one piece at a time."<sup>8</sup>

Even McClellan recognized that with the information contained in Special Order 191, there was now no excuse for not destroying Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. On that same day, Brigadier General John Gibbon talked to McClellan and recounted the Commander's euphoria.

"Here is a paper with which if I cannot whip Bobbie Lee, I will be willing to go home. Tomorrow we will pitch into his centre and if people will only do two good hard days' marching I will put Lee in a position he will find hard to get out of."<sup>9</sup>

So, with the discovery of Lee's operational order for the first phase of the Maryland campaign in his hand on 13 September, McClellan's own campaign plan rapidly shifted gears to the offensive. Thus, at this juncture, the campaign had taken a decided turn for both armies and their Commanders. Lee was on the defensive and McClellan was now pursuing his adversary with vastly increased, although not impressive, vigor in an attempt to fix him for the decisive battle.

However, the decisive battle which Lee also wanted was about to occur at a time and place not of his choosing. McClellan unquestionably had the operational initiative on 13 September 1862 in spite of Lee's tactical advantage at Harpers Ferry.



## THE BATTLE OF ANTIETAM

### PRELUDE (13 September to 16 September 1862)

To close with Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, General McClellan first had to cross the natural obstacle of South Mountain now imposed along his route of march. On the evening of 13 September, Lee had ordered D. H. Hill to block Turner's and Fox's Gaps, the former providing passage of the National Road from Frederick to Hagerstown. General McLaws sent three brigades from his division to block the Union advance through Crampton's Gap which was the closest passage through South Mountain in proximity to Harpers Ferry.

On 14 September, the advanced divisions of McClellan's Army eventually forced passage through each of the gaps, but Lee had gained another valuable day in which to concentrate his army. However, General Jackson had not been able to meet the ambitious time schedule outlined in Special Order 191. Jackson had yet to secure Harpers Ferry and Lee knew that McClellan was now in hot pursuit.

Fearful that he would not be able to unite his divided forces in sufficient time to join McClellan in battle in Maryland, Lee sent a message early on 14 September to Jackson through General McLaws which directed the Army of Northern Virginia to retreat to the south across the Potomac in the vicinity of Shepherdstown. But when Jackson advised him that Harpers Ferry was about to fall he decided to again risk a confrontation with McClellan in Maryland. Essentially, Lee believed that if Jackson was successful in capturing Harpers Ferry on the following day he would still be able to concentrate his army in sufficient time to engage McClellan with the preponderance of the Army of Northern Virginia available to do battle. The place selected by Lee to engage in this epic battle was a small bucolic town in Maryland called Sharpsburg.

Many military historians over the years have questioned Lee's wisdom in opting to fight McClellan at this juncture. From an operational view Bruce Catton provides this insight.

"And yet Lee stayed when he did not have to stay and fought when he did not have to fight, and since he was not out of his mind the only conceivable answer is that he believed that he could win.

He had believed this all along. He would not have entered Maryland otherwise; if to fight at Sharpsburg was to risk the loss of his entire army, to go north of the Potomac at all was to take the same risk. Lee wanted an absolute victory, and to get the kind of fight that could bring such a victory he had to run the risk of absolute defeat. To leave Maryland now without

putting the matter to the test would be to confess that there could not be the kind of victory that could mean Confederate independence.<sup>10</sup>

At daybreak on 15 September, Harpers Ferry fell. The Confederate Army had captured 12,520 prisoners, 13,000 small arms, 73 pieces of artillery, several hundred wagons and considerable clothing and food stores. According to Henry Kyd Douglas, Jackson started his battle weary forces toward Sharpsburg early that same evening with the remaining divisions, except that of A. P. Hill, following on the morning of 16 September.

Following his success in securing passage through the gap of South Mountain, General McClellan pressed his forces in pursuit of the Army of Northern Virginia. His lead elements confronted the Confederate Army across Antietam Creek shortly after noon on 15 September. At this point McClellan had over 75,000 men available for the battle and a force ratio advantage of more than 3 to 1.

Ever cautious, McClellan managed to gradually erode the clear advantage in forces which he enjoyed on both the afternoon of 15 September and the following morning. He spent hours in making a personal reconnaissance of his divisional dispositions rather than entrusting his commanders and staff with these time consuming functions. And, he chose not to attack on the morning of 16 September because the fog was too severe. Consequently, the bulk of Jackson's force was able to close with Lee at Sharpsburg prior to 17 September. Accordingly, McClellan would initiate the battle early on 17 September with a significantly reduced force ratio advantage.

### The Battlefield

The general description of the terrain as written by brevet Lieutenant Colonel George B. Harris follows (a topographic map of the terrain surrounding Sharpsburg to include the battlefield is at figure 3).

"The town of Sharpsburg . . . occupies a saucer shaped depression in the Antietam Valley about two miles from its junction with the Potomac. Four important roads radiate from the town, which, at the time of the battle, was without railroad communication. The Hagerstown Turnpike running nearly due north, the Boonesborough Turnpike running a little north of east, and crossing the Antietam by the Middle Bridge, one mile east of the village, the Harpers Ferry road, running due south and crossing the Antietam by a stone bridge at the Antietam Furnace, beyond the limits of the battlefield and finally, the Shepherdstown road, which runs a little south of west and crosses the Potomac at the Shepherdstown Ford, two and one-half miles distant. It was by this

road that the withdrawal of the Confederate army was effected during the night of the 18th of September.

The ground included within the limits of the battlefield is undulating in character, the undulations gradually increasing in height as the ground recedes from the Potomac. There are a few hills that rise above the general level of the field, the most important being the small range on the east bank of the Antietam, upon which the Federal batteries were posted and behind which the 5th Corps was drawn up in reserve. One mile north of the town stands the Dunkard Church, the central point of the battlefield, at the intersection of the Hagerstown Pike and the Smoketown Road. Three fine bodies of timber, now nearly destroyed, came into prominence during the battle and were known as the North, East and West Woods, respectively. The North Woods lie beyond the Miller House, on both sides of the Hagerstown Pike; the East Woods stand on both sides of the Smoketown Road, about half a mile north of the Dunkard Church; the West Woods surrounded at Dunkard Church, lying entirely on the west side of the Hagerstown Pike. A small farm lane gives access to the farms of Roulette and Mumma from both the Boonesborough and Hagerstown Pikes. In overcoming a steep grade on Roulette's farm a cutting was made, about four hundred feet in length, which has become known as the Sunken Road or Bloody Lane.

The turnpikes and farm lanes gave access to all parts of the field, upon which, save along the banks of Antietam Creek itself, there were no obstacles to the movement of troops and but few to the passage of artillery. The undulating character of the ground and the location of the large bodies of timber which I have described, made it possible to move large bodies of troops from one point to another with comparative safety. This peculiarity of the

topography was fully taken advantage of by the Confederates during the entire battle.

But little can be said in favor of the locality I have described as a position in which to offer defensive battle. The army was obliged to fight with its back to a river, in front of which was the added obstacle of a navigable canal. There was but one practicable ford within the area occupied by the Confederate Army, and this was situated in front of one of the flanks of the line of battle and was thus so located as to be easily commanded by the enemy, approaching by roads over which the Confederate commander could exercise no control. Although the line finally assumed by the Army of Northern Virginia which was largely determined by the varying fortunes of the battle, was one of great natural strength, the peculiar configuration of the ground, to which I have already alluded, was such that the enemy could approach it, at several points, with trifling loss."<sup>11</sup>

While Davis' description of the terrain provides great detail, several points need to be amplified.

- The Confederate line of defense was basically established above the ridge extending north and south from Sharpsburg upon which ran the Hagerstown and Harpers Ferry roads, respectively.

- The Confederate artillery enjoyed only a slight high ground advantage over their Union counterparts who were arrayed for the most part on the north-south ridgeline just east of Antietam Creek.

- It must be emphasized that the Antietam was fordable to infantry virtually throughout its length within the battlefield. Since it was of little obstacle value Lee opted not to defend forward with the exception of a small force from D. R. Jones Division on the Confederate right flank.

- Lee's most vulnerable flank given the nature of the terrain was his left. It was there that he concentrated his force prior to the battle and since this vulnerability was obvious to McClellan as well it was here that the Union commander launched his first attacks.

The Confederate Scheme of Defense (Refer to Antietam Battlefield Map at Figure 1)

On the morning of 17 September, Lee defended the Sharpsburg ridge with Jackson's command positioned to the left of the town and Longstreet's command to the right. To the extreme left flank of Jackson's command was posted Jeb Stuart's calvary and artillery. His calvary screened between the Potomac River to the west and his artillery was positioned on the commanding height of Nicodemus Hill. On Stuart's immediate right was Jackson's old division now commanded by Brigadier General J. R. Jones. Jackson's Division occupied the West Woods to the west of the Hagerstown Turnpike. Ewell's Division, commanded by Brigadier General Lawton, was positioned in the field east of the Hagerstown Turnpike. Both divisions were oriented to the north. Brigadier General John B. Hood's division of Texans occupied supporting positions near the Dunkard Church.

In the center Lee positioned the relatively small 3000 man division commanded by Brigadier General D. H. Hill. This division took up positions east of the Hagerstown Turnpike on a half-moon configuration generally following the trace of the northern extremity of the Sunken Road.

Immediately east and south of Sharpsburg was located the division of Brigadier General D. R. Jones. One of Jones's brigades commanded by Brigadier General Robert Toombs was entrenched well forward along the bluff overlooking what is now known as Burnside's Bridge. Toombs's Brigade was the only Confederate unit which Lee opted to position on the western bank immediately opposite Antietam Creek. Until 9:00 a.m. on 17 September, Brigadier General John S. Walker's Division occupied the extreme right flank of Lee's line overlooking Snavelly's Ford. Colonel Thomas Mumford's calvary was positioned to screen the right flank between Walker's right flank and the Harpers Ferry road bridge which crossed the Antietam near Antietam Iron Works, a distance of approximately 2.5 kilometers.

While Lee failed to record his plan of defense it is obvious both from his initial disposition as well as his conduct of the defense that his concept was predicated on two fundamental principles: mobility and flexibility. Realizing that he was greatly outnumbered by McClellan's army and that as the defender he had forfeited the tactical initiative to his foe, Lee recognized that he would be required to shift forces from lesser threatened points along his defensive line to those points where the attacker was concentrating his effort. Additionally, Lee knew he would be sending Jackson's divisions, which were still arriving from Harper's Ferry, to bolster weak and threatened points along the line. This dictated a great degree of flexibility among his subordinate commanders in order to achieve maximum synchronization of effort.

The highly maneuver-oriented defense which Lee adopted at Antietam apparently ruled out, at least in Lee's mind, the employment of earthworks or entrenchments, which characterize static defenses. One could argue that Lee should have ordered the construction of entrenchments to be occupied on order, thereby enhancing the survivability of his command without sacrificing mobility or flexibility. However, he did not and since Lee's rationale for entrenching only one of his brigades apparently has not been recorded it will remain one of the many unanswered questions associated with this battle.

Perhaps the single most debated point concerning Lee's commandership during the Maryland campaign was his decision to stand and fight at Sharpsburg. Even Longstreet questioned Lee's wisdom in this regard following the war.

Bruce Catton has posited this reason:

"General Lee had both military and political reasons equally imperative for hazarding a battle at Antietam, desperately bold as his determination may seem. General Lee knew that if he retreated into Virginia General McClellan must follow him with an army that much more inspirited; and McClellan's army did not fight well at Sharpsburg. He knew that the longer McClellan had to organize his army the better he would make it. In his address to the people of Maryland General Lee had almost pledged his army not to give up that state without a struggle; and if he could win on Maryland soil, it would be of incalculable benefit to his army and the cause of the South, and so imperil the safety of Washington as to make any result for our good probable. Whatever his reasons, he determined to stake his little army of about 35,000 against McClellan's 87,000 and take the chances."<sup>12</sup>

#### The Union Plan of Attack

McClellan described his plan of attack in a report dated 15 October 1862.

"The design was to make a main attack upon the enemy's left - at least to create a dimension in favor of the main attack, with the hope of something more by assailing the enemy's right - and as soon as one or both of the flank movements were successful, to attack their center with any reserve I might have on hand."<sup>13</sup>

General McClellan began to deploy his Army in accordance with that design on the afternoon of 16 September.

"On the right, near Keedysville, on both sides of the Sharpsburg turnpike, were Sumner's and Hooker's corps. In advance, on the right of the turnpike and near the Antietam River, General Richardson's division, of

General Sumner's corps, was posted. General Sykes' division, of General Porter's corps, was on the left of the turnpike and in line with General Richardson, protecting the Bridge No. 2, over the Antietam. The left of the line, opposite to and some distance from Bridge No. 3, was occupied by General Burnside's corps."<sup>14</sup>

McClellan continued his deployment for the attack throughout the evening of 16 September and early the following morning.

"About 2 p.m. General Hooker with his corps, consisting of Generals Ricketts', Meade's, and Doubleday's divisions, was ordered to cross the Antietam at a ford, and at Bridge No. 1, a short distance above, to attack and, if possible, turn the enemy's left. General Sumner was ordered to cross the corps of General Mansfield (the Twelfth) during the night and hold his own (the Second) Corps ready to cross early the next morning. On reaching the vicinity of the enemy's left, a sharp contest commenced with the Pennsylvania Reserves--the advance of General Hooker's corps--near the house of D. Miller. The enemy were driven from the strip of woods where he was first met. The firing lasted until after dark, when General Hooker's corps rested on their arms on ground won from the enemy . . .

During the night General Mansfield's corps, consisting of Generals Williams' and Greene's divisions, crossed the Antietam at the same ford and bridge that General Hooker's troops had passed, and bivouacked on the farm of J. Poffenberger, about a mile in rear of General Hooker's position."<sup>15</sup>

General Jacob Cox offered these observations in regard to McClellan's tactical plan following the war.

"On the right, in front of Hooker, it was easy to turn the Confederate line. The road from Keedysville through Smoketown to the Hagerstown turnpike crossed the Antietam in a hollow, out of the line of fire, and a march around Lee's left flank could be made almost wholly under cover. The topography of

the field therefore suggested a flank attack from our right, if the National commander rejected the better strategy of interposing his army between Lee and Jackson as too daring a movement. This flank attack McClellan determined to make, and some time after noon of the 16th issued his orders accordingly.<sup>16</sup>

Criticism of McClellan's tactical plan at Antietam has been widespread. Generally, military historians fault the concept on the basis of its lack of clarity. While McClellan states that the main attack would be initiated against the Confederate left, he states next that this attack may serve as a diversion in favor of a main attack presumably elsewhere. This would leave most individuals with the basic question - is the attack on the Confederate left to be a diversion or main attack?

In a report covering his entire career in the war, dated 4 August 1863, McClellan modified the tactical design and further confused his true intent.

"My plan for the impending general engagement was to attack the enemy's left with the corps of Hooker and Mansfield supported by Sumner's and if necessary by Franklin's, and as soon as matters looked favorable there, to move the corps of Burnside against the enemy's extreme right upon the ridge running to the south and rear of Sharpsburg, and having carried their position to press along the crest toward our right, and whenever either of these flank movements should be successful, to advance our centre with all the forces then disposable."<sup>17</sup>

McClellan's first explanation of his tactical plan leads one to believe that the Union forces on the right and left would attack simultaneously. His second explanation suggests that the attack would occur sequentially across the front with the attack on the Confederate left being initiated first followed by attacks on his right and center.

The point to be made is that his order contributed to confusion in regard to whom would be making the main and supporting attacks and the degree of coordination to be effected among those attacks; e.g., were they to occur simultaneously or sequentially?

At least one subordinate, the Commander of the Ninth Corps, interpreted McClellan's plan of attack as being more consistent with the concept described in the October 1862 report.

"The opinion I got from Burnside at the time, as to the part the Ninth Corps was to take, was fairly consistent with the design first quoted, namely, that when the attack by Sumner, Hooker, and Franklin should be progressing



favorably, we were 'to create a diversion in favor of the main attack, with the hope of something more.' It is also probable that Hooker's movement was at first intended to be made by his corps alone, the attack to be taken up by Sumner's two corps as soon as Hooker began, and to be shared in by Franklin if he reached the field in time, thus making a simultaneous oblique attack from our right by the whole army except Porter's corps, which was in reserve, and the Ninth Corps, which was to create the 'diversion' on our left and prevent the enemy from stripping his right to reinforce his left."<sup>18</sup>

Two observations need to be made at this juncture:

- The allocation of forces to the attacks on both flanks seem to clearly support the concept of a main attack by three Union corps against the Confederate's left and a supporting (or as McClellan calls it a diversionary) attack by one corps against Lee's right.

- While the allocation of forces clearly supports this design neither the timing of the execution of the Union attack or preliminary guidance passed to General Burnside by McClellan seem to make sense. If Burnside's attack was a supporting attack designed to draw Lee's combat power from his left then the Ninth corps should reasonably have initiated the overall attack. In spite of the confusion surrounding Burnside's directed and actual time of attack there is little question that McClellan opted to kick off the attack sequentially with Hooker's Corps leading the way against the Confederate left flank. Since Burnside did not attack in his zone of action before 9:00 a.m. and the battle to his north had already been raging for two and one-half hours, Lee was able to shift Walker's division to reinforce Jackson's force on his left. Consequently, the supporting attack did not serve as a diversionary effort as designed by McClellan. In fact, the lack of synchronization in the Union's execution of the attack worked to Lee's advantage and McClellan's disadvantage. If the attacks on the Confederate flanks were to performed sequentially then clearly the supporting attack should have been directed to go first. It did not.

#### The Morning Phase (6:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.)

At the first glimpse of dawn Hooker's I Corps struck hard against the Confederate left commanded by General Jackson. Hooker advanced toward the Dunkard Church with two divisions forward and a third following in reserve. Brigadier General Abner Doubleday's division advanced along the Hagerstown Turnpike and Brigadier General James Pickett's division moved astride the Smoketown Road. General George Meade's division which was held in reserve followed in the center. Hooker's corps was supported by massed batteries of artillery on a ridge near the Poffenberger House to their rear and batteries to their flank east of Antietam Creek.

Jackson's Confederate defenders met the onrushing Union tide in the cornfield, centered between the east and west woods. The effect of artillery sweeping this relatively flat piece of land was devastating to the infantry of both sides. The carnage was terrible. Although strongly contested by both sides the Union forces eventually prevailed and the Confederates withdrew to the West Woods.

Hooker who observed the battle close at hand during the attack noted that he saw the reflection of sunlight from the Confederate bayonets projecting above the corn stalks. He directed all of his spare batteries to the left of the cornfield and they proceeded to rake the Confederates with cannister and shell. Hooker later recorded,

"every stalk of corn in the northern and greater part of the field was cut as closely as could have been done with a knife, and the slain lay in rows as precisely as they had stood in their ranks a few moments before. It was never my fortune to witness a more bloody, dismal battlefield."<sup>18</sup>

As General Doubleday's division pushed through the cornfield, General Pickett's division reached the southern edge of the East Woods and General Meade's reserve division began to press forward.

General Hood's division of Texans, which had been brought off the line of battle on the previous night after clashing with Hooker's corps was now committed from its reserve position in the West Woods vicinity of Dunkard Church to counterattack. His division smashed into Doubleday's and Meade's divisions. Meanwhile Jubal Early's brigade attacked one of Doubleday's brigades from the flank and rear and three brigades from D. H. Hill's division reinforced Hood's counterattack on the right flank. Hooker's attack was spent and the Confederate counterattack drove the Union forces back toward their supporting batteries in the East Woods.

In the East Woods the Confederate forces now became engaged with Mansfield's XII corps which was moving up to support Hooker. While attempting to speed the forward movement of his corps to support the remnants of Hooker's force Mansfield was killed. Command of the XII corps now devolved upon Brigadier General Alpheus Williams, whose division proceeded to press the attack once again across the ground recently relinquished by Hooker.

William's division attacked south along the Hagerstown Turnpike and after an hour and a half made little progress against J. R. Jones' division in the West Woods. However, on the XII corps left flank, Brigadier General George A. Green's division succeeded in breaking through a gap in the Confederate defenses and eventually advanced all the way to the Dunkard Church before being stopped. It was now close to 9:00 a.m., and McClellan's army had made

two uncoordinated and unsuccessful attacks with the piecemeal commitment of the I and XII corps and Sumner's II corps was preparing to make it a third.

Sedgwick's division from II corps had forded the Antietam at 7:45 a.m., and was now poised short of the East Woods. Moving rapidly through the East Woods and heavy Confederate artillery fire in the cornfield, Sedgwick's division of 6000 men drove into the West Woods. They were initially opposed by a single brigade from Early's division and the remainder of Jackson's division. Lee had observed the gradual erosion of his defenses on the left flank and now sent McLaws's division, only recently arrived from Harpers Ferry, and Walker's division, which until 9:00 a.m. had been defending on the Confederate right flank, to reinforce the threatened line on the left. Jackson rapidly employed his reinforcements to form a large killing zone for the advancing Union corps.

French's division of II corps had veered away from the corps' axis of attack earlier and was now moving along with Richardson's division toward the Confederate center. Consequently, Sedgwick's division was entering Jackson's trap without the support of his sister divisions.

Once Sedgwick's division had penetrated into the depths of the West Woods, Jackson attacked by fire from all directions. Unable to maneuver in this confined area, Sedgwick's men were virtually helpless. In minutes Sedgwick's force suffered 2,200 casualties. In an attempt to follow up on his success, Jackson counterattacked back across the cornfield but was once again caught in an overwhelming crossfire of grape and cannister from Union artillery. He gradually withdrew back to the West Woods. With this final effort the Union attack against the Confederate left flank came to an end.

#### The Midday Phase (9:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.)

When French's division veered south the misdirection effectively separated his and Richardson's divisions from II corps control. Their axis took them toward the Roulette Farm where they engaged Confederate skirmishes from D. H. Hill's division. Forcing the skirmishes to retreat, French's three brigades, which were now on line, crested the next ridge to the south. As they crested this ridge they were met by the concentrated fire from two Confederate brigades commanded by Brigadier Generals Robert Rodes and G. B. Anderson. These brigades occupied good covered positions provided by the eroded farm road about which they were formed. From positions adjacent to along what has now become known as Bloody Lane, the Union forces assaulted and retreated over a period of two hours and thirty minutes with neither side gaining any ground.

At noon, Richardson finally maneuvered his division to a position from which to attack G. B. Anderson's brigade's right flank. As Richardson's lead brigades crested the hill to Anderson's right flank they were able to bring devastating enfilade fire onto the Confederate soldiers occupying positions along the Sunken Road. The results were murderous and the name "Bloody Lane" forever recorded into American military history.

Lee, observing that his center was about to crumble, sent R. H. Anderson's division forward to counterattack. Soon after their arrival near Bloody Lane, R. H. Anderson was killed and the Confederate counterattack died as well. Richardson and his division pressed the attack only to fail when he too was killed, only yards away from the Hagerstown Turnpike. It took a gallant rally by the remnant of D. H. Hill's two brigades to stem the Union advance.

McClellan had met with unexpected success against Lee's center, but caution prevailed and he opted not to reinforce the hardwon success achieved by Sumner's two errant divisions. Franklin's VI corps and Porter's V Corps would remain uncommitted.

It was now 1:00 p.m. and time for the last phase of the Battle of Antietam to begin. A description of this phase is provided in detail during the walking tour.

## CHAPTER II

### ENDNOTES

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3. James Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, Memoirs of the Civil War in America, (Bloomington, Indiana: The Indiana University Press, 1891), p. 279.
4. Jacob Dolson Cox, Military Reminiscences of the Civil War, Volume I, (New York, Charles Scribners Sons, 1900), pp. 295-296.
5. Ibid., p. 297.
6. Wartime Papers, pp. 301-303.
7. Campaigns in Virginia Maryland and Pennsylvania, 1862-1863, Volume III. Papers of the Histriocal Society of Massachusetts (Boston, Griffith-Stillings Press, 1903), p. 32.
8. Bruce Catton, The Centennial History of the Civil War, Volume II, Terrible Swift Sword, (New York, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1963), p. 449.
9. John Gibbon, Personal Recollections of the Civil War, (New York, Putnam's, 1928), p. 73.
10. Catton, p. 451.
11. Campaigns in Virginia, pp. 51-53.
12. Catton, p. 453.
13. US Department of War, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, (128 Volumes, Washington, 1890-1901), Sec. I, Vol. XIX, pt. 1, p. 55. (Hereafter cited as Official Records)
14. George B. McClellan, McClellan's Own Story. (New York, Charles L. Webster and Company, 1887), p. 588.
15. McClellan, pp. 590-591.
16. Cox, p. 304.
17. McClellan, p. 590.

18. Cox, pp. 305-307.
19. Official Reports, p. 968.

CHAPTER III

ORDER OF BATTLE

A. ORGANIZATION OF THE ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA.  
GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE, COMMANDING<sup>1</sup>

LONGSTREET'S CORPS.-MAJ. GEN. JAMES LONGSTREET

JONES' DIVISION

Brig. Gen. DAVID R. JONES

Toombs' Brigade

Brig. Gen. ROBERT TOOMBS  
Col. HENRY L. BENNING

2nd Georgia  
15th Georgia  
17th Georgia  
20th Georgia

Pickett's Brigade

Col. EPPA HUNTON  
Brig. Gen. R. B. GARNETT

8th Virginia  
18th Virginia  
19th Virginia  
28th Virginia  
56th Virginia

Kemper's Brigade

Brig. Gen. J. L. KEMPER

1st Virginia  
7th Virginia  
11th Virginia  
17th Virginia  
24th Virginia

Drayton's Brigade

Brig. Gen. THOMAS F. DRAYTON

50th Georgia  
51st Georgia  
15th South Carolina

Jenkins' Brigade

Col. JOSEPH WALKER

1st South Carolina (Volunteers,  
2d South Carolina Rifles  
5th South Carolina  
6th South Carolina  
4th South Carolina Battalion  
Palmetto (South Carolina) Sharpshooters

Anderson's Brigade

Col. GEORGE T. ANDERSON

1st Georgia (Regulars)  
7th Georgia  
8th Georgia  
9th Georgia  
11th Georgia, Maj. F. H. Little.

Artillery

Fauquier (Virginia) Artillery (Stribling's battery)\*  
Loudoun (Virginia) Artillery (Rogers' battery)\*  
Turner (Virginia) Artillery (Leake's battery)\*  
Wise (Virginia) Artillery (J. S. Brown's battery)

ARTILLERY

Washington (Louisiana) Artillery

Col. J. B. WALTON

1st Company, Capt. C. W. Squires  
2nd Company, Capt. J. B. Richardson  
3d Company, Capt. M. B. Miller  
4th Company, Capt. B. F. Coleman



Lee's Battalion

Col. S. D. Lee

Ashland (Virginia) Artillery, Capt. P. Woolfolk, jr.  
Bedford (Virginia) Artillery, Capt. T. C. JORDAN  
Brooks (South Carolina) Artillery, Lieut. Willaim  
Elliott  
Eubank's (Virginia) battery, Capt. J. L. Eubank  
Madison (Louisiana) Light Artillery, Capt. G. V.  
Moody  
Parker's (Virginia) battery, Capt. W. W. Parker

HILL'S LIGHT DIVISION

Maj. Gen. AMBROSE P. HILL

Branch's Brigade

Brig. Gen. L. O'B. BRANCH  
Col. JAMES H. LANE

7th North Carolina  
18th North Carolina  
28th North Carolina  
33d North Carolina  
37th North Carolina

Gregg's Brigade

Brig. Gen. MAXCY GREGG

1st South Carolina (Provisional Army)  
12th South Carolina  
13th South Carolina  
14th South Carolina

Field's Brigade

Colonel BROCKENBROUGH

40th Virginia  
47th Virginia  
55th Virginia  
22d Virginia Battalion

Archer's Brigade

Brig. Gen. J. J. ARCHER  
Col. PETER TURNEY.

5th Alabama Battalion  
19th Georgia  
1st Tennessee (Provisional Army)  
7th Tennessee  
14th Tennessee

Pender's Brigade

Brig. Gen. WILLIAM D. PENDER  
Col. R. H. BREWER

16th North Carolina  
22d North Carolina  
34th North Carolina  
38th North Carolina

Thomas' Brigade

Col. EDWARD L. THOMAS.

14th Georgia  
35th Georgia  
45th Georgia  
49th Georgia

Artillery

Maj. R. L. WALKER

Branch (North Caroline) Artillery (A. C. Latham's battery)  
Crenshaw's (Virginia) battery  
Fredericksburg (Virginia) Artillery (Braxton's battery)  
Letcher (Virginia) Artillery (Davidson's battery)  
Middlesex (Virginia) Artillery (Fleet's battery)  
Pee Dee (South Carolina) Artillery (McIntosh's battery)  
Purcell (Virginia) Artillery (Pegram's battery)

Cavalry

Robertson's Brigade

Brig. Gen. B. H. ROBERTSON  
Col. THOMAS T. MUNFORD

2nd Virginia  
6th Virginia  
7th Virginia  
12th Virginia  
17th Virginia Battalion

Horse Artillery

Capt. JOHN PELHAM

Chew's (Virginia) battery  
Hart's (South Carolina) battery  
Pelham's (Virginia) battery

NOTE: (1) The Charlottesville Artillery, left at Richmond in August did not rejoin the Army till after the battle of Sharpsburg. John R. Johnson's and D'Aquin's batteries were the only ones present with this division at Sharpsburg, the others having been left at Harper's Ferry and Shepherdstown.

Braxton's Crenshaw's McIntosh's and Pegram's batteries engaged at Sharpsburg. Davidson's battery had been left at Harper's Ferry, and Fleet's and Latham's batteries at Leesburg.

(2) Only those forces of the Army of Northern Virginia which engage the Union Ninth Corps are included in the Order of Battle.

B. ORGANIZATION OF THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC, MAJ. GEN. GEORGE B. MCCLELLAN, U. S. ARMY, COMMANDING

NINTH ARMY CORPS

Maj. Gen. AMBROSE E. BURNSIDE  
Maj. Gen. JESSE L. RENO  
Brig. Gen. JACOB D. COX

ESCORT

1st Maine Cavalry

FIRST DIVISION

Brig. Gen. ORLANDO B. WILCOX

First Brigade

Col. BENJAMIN C. CHRIST

28th Massachusetts  
17th Michigan  
79th New York  
50th Pennsylvania

Second Brigade

Col. THOMAS WELSH

8th Michigan  
46th New York  
45th Pennsylvania  
100th Pennsylvania

Artillery

Massachusetts Light, Eighth Battery, Capt. Asa M. Cook  
2d United States, Battery E. Lieut. Samuel N. Benjamin

SECOND DIVISION

Brig. Gen. SAMUEL D. STURGIS

First Brigade

Brig. Gen. JAMES NAGLE

2d Maryland  
6th New Hampshire  
9th New Hampshire  
48th Pennsylvania

Second Brigade

Brig. Gen. EDWARD FERRERO

21st Massachusetts  
35th Massachusetts  
51st New York  
51st Pennsylvania

Artillery

Pennsylvania Light Battery D, Capt. George W. Durell  
4th United States, Battery E. Capt. Joseph C. Clark, jr.

THIRD DIVISION

Brig. Gen. ISAAC P. RODMAN

First Brigade

Col. HARRISON S. FAIRCHILD

9th New York  
89th New York  
103d New York

Second Brigade

Col. EDWARD HARLAND

8th Connecticut  
11th Connecticut  
16th Connecticut  
4th Rhode Island

Artillery

5th United States, Battery A, Lieut. Charles P. Muhlenberg.

KANAWHA DIVISION

Brig. Gen. JACOB D. COX  
Col. ELIAKIM P. SCAMMON

First Brigade

Col. ELIAKIM P. SCAMMON  
Col. HUGH EWING

12th Ohio  
23d Ohio  
30th Ohio

Ohio Light Artillery, First Battery, Capt. James R.

McMullin

Gilmore's company West Virginia Cavalry, Lieut.

James Abraham

Harrison's company West Virginia Cavalry, Lieut.

Dennis Delaney

Second Brigade

Col. GEORGE CROOK

11th Ohio

28th Ohio

36th Ohio

Schambeck's company Chicago Dragoons, Capt.

Frederick Schambeck

Kentucky Light artillery Simmonds' battery,

Capt. Seth J. Simmonds

### CHAPTER III

#### ENDNOTES

1. Official Records, pp. 805-811.
2. Ibid., pp. 177-179.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE TOUR

#### UNION ATTACKS AT 'BURSIDE'S' BRIDGE-STOP ONE

The walking tour starts at a point approximately 150 meters east of the Burnside Bridge. Consequently, it is advisable to park your automobile in the parking area which overlooks the bridge from the west. Getting to this parking area by car is relatively easy irrespective of your approach into Sharpsburg. It is recommended that you proceed east from Sharpsburg on Maryland Route 34. This is referred to as the Sharpsburg-Boonsboro turnpike. After you have driven approximately one kilometer on Route 34 from its junction with Maryland Route 65 turn south (right) onto Branch Avenue. Remain on Branch Avenue again for one kilometer and then turn east (left) onto the access road leading to Burnside Bridge. This junction is easily recognizable as the Sherrick and Otto Farms stand on either side of the access road. The access road parallels Antietam Creek for the last 400 meters prior to arriving at the parking area. Leave your car here and walk down the asphalt path that leads to the bridge. As you are looking down at the bridge from the overlook the path starts to the right. Cross over the bridge and proceed due east for 150 meters. Your first stop is located here on the open, lower slopes of the hill immediately facing the bridge and the high ground on the western bank where you parked your car.

You are now less than 50 meters forward (to the west) of the picket line established by the Union Ninth Corps on the evening of 16 September.

A vivid description of the terrain immediately to your front was provided by Brigadier General Jacob Cox, who commanded the Ninth Corps during this battle for the recognized commander, Major General Ambrose Burnside.

"The bridge itself is a stone structure of three arches, with stone parapet above, this parapet to some extent flanking the approach to the bridge at either end. The valley in which the stream runs is quite narrow, the steep slope on the right bank approaching quite to the water's edge. On this slope the roadway is scarped, running both ways from the bridge end, and passing to the higher land above by ascending through ravines above and below; the other ravine being some 600 yards above the bridge, the turn about half that distance below. On the hillside immediately above the bridge was a strong stone



fence running parallel to the stream. The turns of the roadway were covered by rifle-pits and breastworks, made of rails and stone, all of which defenses, as well as the woods which covered the slope, were filled with the enemy's infantry and sharpshooters. Besides the infantry defenses, batteries were placed to enfilade the bridge and all its approaches. The crest of the first hill above the bridge is curved toward the stream at the extremes, forming a sort of natural *tete-de-pont*. The next ridge beyond rises somewhat higher though with less regularity, the depression between the two being but slight, and the distance varying in places from 300 to 700 yards.<sup>1</sup>

Various views of the bridge and the surrounding terrain from both sides are shown in illustrations 1 through 4.<sup>2</sup>

modern



Figure 1. Burnside's Bridge today as viewed from Stonewall on the Union side of Antietam Creek.

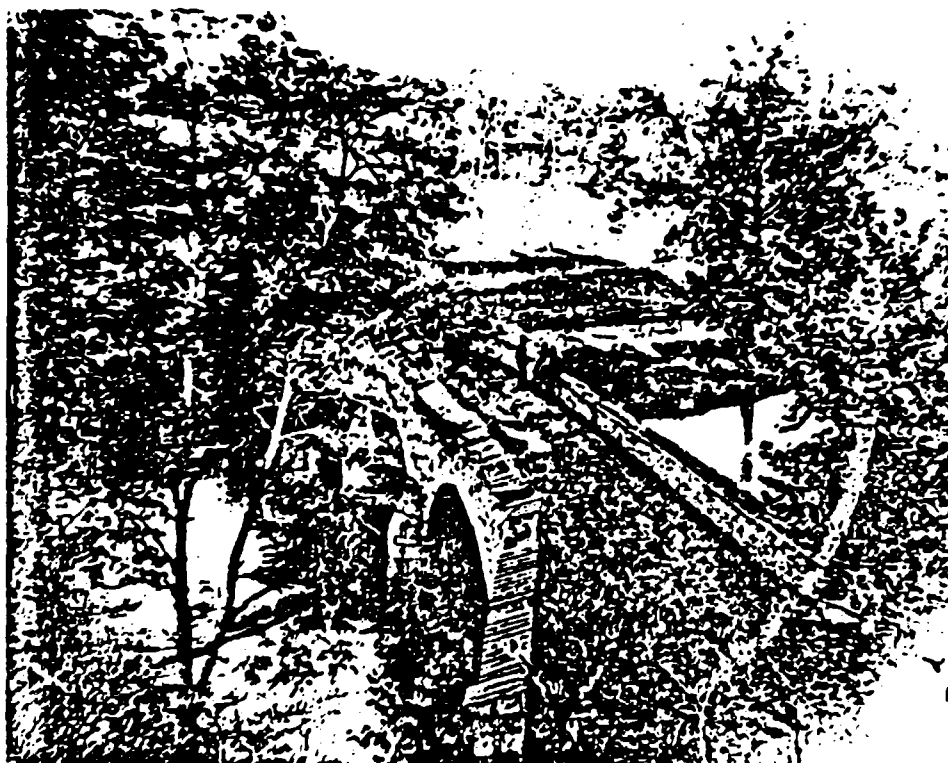
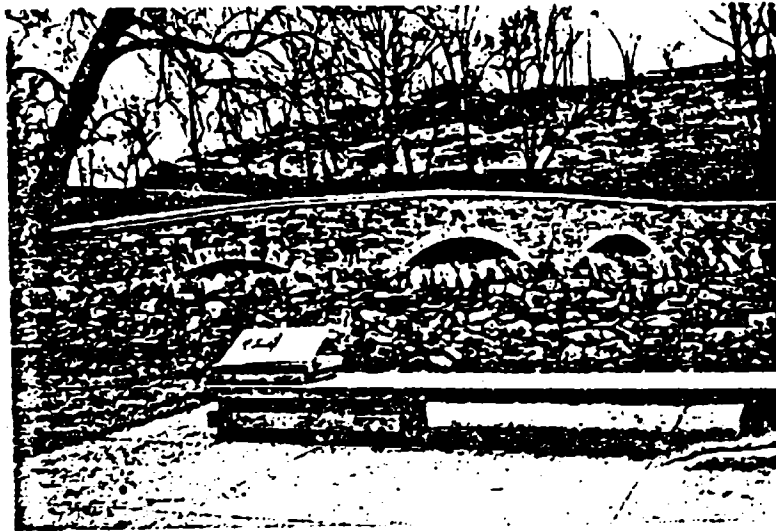


Figure 2. Burnside's Bridge from same perspective as figure 1 after the battle.



modern

Figure 3. Burnside's Bridge today from the perspective of the Confederate forces of Brig. Gen. Toombs' Brigade who defended from the heights overlooking the bridge on the west bank of the Antietam.



Figure 4. Burnside's Bridge from the same perspective as shown on figure 3 taken shortly after the battle.

Cox further amplified his assessment of the terrain east of the bridge in the following excerpt from his military reminiscences:

" . . . Burnside had selected for himself . . . a high knoll northeast of Burnside Bridge near a haystack which was a prominent landmark. [This] hill . . . was the bolder and more prominent crest of the line of hills which skirted the Antietam on the east and was broken by depressions here and there, through which the country roads ran down to the stream. Such a hollow was at the south of Burnside's position at the haystack on the Roherback farm. In rear of him and a little lower down were the farm buildings, and from these a road ran down the winding hollow to the Antietam, but reached the stream several hundred yards below the bridge. Following the road, therefore, it was necessary to turn upstream upon the narrow space between the hills and the water, without any cover from the fire of the enemy on the opposite side. The bluffs on that side were wooded to the water's edge, and were so steep that the road from the bridge could not go up at right angles to the bank, but forked both ways and sought the upper land by a more gradual ascent to the right and left. The fork to the right ran around a shoulder of the hill into a ravine which there reaches the Antietam, and thence ascends by an easy grade into Sharpsburg. The left branch of the road raises by a similar but less marked depression."<sup>3</sup>

The tactical importance of the bridge; the limited number of available fording sides which had been identified; and the creek's value as a natural obstacle were major factors in the conduct of this the final phase of the Antietam Battle. The significance of each was described by Cox in the following passage:

"The Antietam is a deep creek, with few fords at an normal stage of water, and the principal roads cross it upon stone bridges. Of these there were three within the field of battle; the upper one in front of the Keedysville, the middle one upon the Boonsboro turnpike, and the lower one on the Sharpsburg and Rohersville road, since known as Burnside's Bridge . . . we were

instructed that the only fords of the Antietam passable at that time were one between the two upper bridges . . . and another about one half mile below Burnside's Bridge, in a deep bend in the stream. We found, however, during the engagement of the seventeenth another practicable crossing for infantry a short distance above the bridge. This was not a ford in common use, but in the low stage of water at the time it was made available for a small force."<sup>4</sup>

Henry Ryd Douglas, an officer in Stonewall Jackson's command, who was born and raised west of Sharpsburg, took exception to the obstacle value of Antietam Creek:

"Go look at it [Antietam Creek] and tell me if you don't think Burnside and his corps might have executed a hop, skip, and jump and landed on the other side. One thing is certain, they might have waded it that day without getting their waistbelts wet in any place."<sup>5</sup>

General Burnside described the initial disposition of the Ninth Corps east of the bridge in his after action report to General McClellan. (Antietam Battlefield map 1 shows the disposition of the opposing Confederate and Union armies on the evening of 16 September).

"The distribution of the forces was as follows: On the crest of the hill immediately in front of the bridge was Benjamin's battery of six 20 pounders, with the remaining batteries in rear of the crest under partial cover; in rear of Benjamin's battery on the extreme right, joining on to General Sykes' division, was General Crook's brigade, with General Sturgis' division in his rear; on the left, and in rear of Benjamin's battery, was Rodman's division, with Scammon's brigade in support; General Wilcox's division was held in reserve. The whole command bivouacked in these positions in three lines on the night of the 16th."<sup>6</sup>

It is important to note that the initial displacement of the Ninth Corps was not acceptable to General McClellan and he personally directed his engineers in the positioning of Burnside's Ninth Corps. Such direct intervention in the obvious responsibilities of one of his corps commanders and former West

Point classmates was indicative of the eroding personal relationship between the two. A note from McClellan to Burnside written on the evening of the sixteenth, but not delivered until the following day, further illustrates the growing division in their personal relationship.

"HEADQUARTERS, ARMY OF THE POTOMAC,

September 16, 1862.

MAJOR-GENERAL BURNSIDE, Commanding Ninth Corps, etc.

GENERAL,--The General commanding has learned that although your corps was ordered to be in a designated position at 12 M. to-day, at or near sunset only one division and four batteries had reached the ground intended for your troops. The general has also been advised that there was a delay of some four hours in the movement of your command yesterday. I am instructed to call upon you for explanations of these failures on your part to comply with the orders given you, and to add, in view of the important military operations now at hand, the commanding general cannot lightly regard such marked departure from the tenor of his instructions.

I am, general, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

Lieutenant-Colonel, Aide-de-camp, and Act'g Ass't Adj. Gen."<sup>7</sup>

Prior to daybreak on the seventeenth there was little change to the Union positions as established by nightfall on the sixteenth. However, the appearance of the morning sun and the initiation of Hooker's attack on the Confederate left was accompanied by a major exchange of artillery across both lines. General Cox noted that:

"The positions which had been assigned us in the dusk of evening were found to be exposed, in some places, to the direct fire of the Confederate guns. Rodman's division suffered more than the others, Fairchild's brigade alone reporting thirty-six casualties before they could find cover. My own tents had been pitched at the edge of a little grove of forest trees, and the headquarters mess was at breakfast at sunrise when the cannonade began. The rapid explosion of shrapnel about us hastened our morning meal; the tents were struck and loaded upon the wagons, horses were saddled, and everything made

ready for the contingencies of the day. It was not till seven o'clock that orders came to advance toward the creek as far as could be done without exposing the men to unnecessary loss. Rodman was directed to acquaint himself with the situation of the ford in front of him, and Sturgis to seek the best means of approach to the stone bridge. All were then to remain in readiness to obey further order."<sup>8</sup>

Lieutenant Benjamin's battery of 20 pound parrot guns responded to the Confederate shelling of Rodman's division as noted in his report.

"On the morning of the 17th we opened fire early on a battery which was shelling General Rodman's division, soon silencing it. Several times during the day we engaged a battery of eight guns to the right of Sharpsburg, each time driving the cannoneers from their guns. We also fired on batteries to the left of the town, to draw their fire from our infantry."<sup>9</sup>

The redispersions of the Union forces prior to 7:00 a.m. are shown on Antietam Battlefield Maps 1 through 7, at section VII.

At approximately 7:00 a.m., Burnside received the order from General McClellan to prepare to attack. It is important to note that McClellan only advised Burnside to prepare to attack at 7:00 a.m. and this was at least an hour after Hooker had initiated the Union attack against the Confederate left. This seems to substantiate theories that McClellan planned to attack sequentially along the front which might have worked had not the separate attacks been spaced so far apart. Burnside's account in the official records follows.

"About this time I received an order from the general commanding to make my dispositions to carry the stone bridge over the Antietam nearly opposite our center, but to await further orders before making the attack. I accordingly threw my lines forward.

The disposition of the troops at this time was as follows: General Crook's brigade and General Sturgis' division immediately in front of the bridge and the ford, a short distance above, their front covered by the Eleventh Connecticut, Col. H. W. Kingsbury, thrown out as skirmishers; General Rodman's division, with Scammon's brigade in support, opposite the ford, some

three-quarters of a mile below the bridge; General Wilcox's division in the woods at the left of Benjamin's battery, in rear of the other lines. Benjamin's battery retained its original position, and the following batteries were placed in advance on his right and left, those on the left overlooking the bridge and the heights above it; Clark's and Durell's on the right; Muhlenberg's, Cook's, and McMullin's on the left, and one section of Simmonds' with Crook's brigade and one section with Benjamin's battery. The battery of Dahlgren boat howitzers, attached to the Ninth New York, covered the crossing of Rodman's division at the ford below."<sup>10</sup>

General Cox relates what happened once the Ninth Corps was repositioned for the attack.

"When these arrangements had been made, I rode to the position Burnside had selected for himself, which was upon a high knoll northeast of the Burnside bridge, near a haystack which was a prominent landmark.

As the morning wore on, we saw lines of troops advancing from our right upon the other side of the Antietam, and engaging the enemy between us and the East Wood. The Confederate lines facing them now also rose into view. From our position we looked, as it were, down between the opposing lines as if they had been the sides of a street, and as the fire opened we saw wounded men carried to the rear and stragglers making off. . . . This contest was going on, and it was yet uncertain which would succeed, when one of McClellan's staff rode up with an order to Burnside. The latter turned to me, saying we were ordered to make our attack. I left the hill-top at once to give personal supervision to the movement ordered, and did not return to it."<sup>11</sup>

While the specific time at which Burnside was ordered to attack has been debated, the preponderance of historical evidence points to a time close to 10:00 a.m. General McClellan stirred most of the debate by stating in his second official report published in 1863 that he ordered Burnside to attack at 8:00 a.m. However, his preliminary report dated 16 October 1862 states that Burnside was ordered to attack at 9:10 a.m., at least that was the time the



order was signed. The attack order itself as well as concurrent battlefield activity which was recorded at the time of the order's receipt, substantiates the 9:10 a.m. time.

"HEAD-QUARTERS, ARMY OF THE POTOMAC,

September 17, 1862, -9:10 A.M.

MAJOR-GENERAL BURNSIDE:

GENERAL, -General Franklin's command is within one mile and a half of here. General McClellan desires you to open your attack. As soon as you shall have uncovered the upper stone bridge you will be supported, and, if necessary, on you own line of attack. So far all is going well.

Respectfully, GEO. D. RUGGLES, Colonel, Etc."12

The time disparity of 50 minutes from the signing of the attack document until its receipt by Burnside is reasonable when one considers normal administrative lethargy and the time distance factor from Army and Ninth Corps headquarters.

The difficult task of taking the bridge and securing the west bank which was entrusted to the Ninth Corps is discussed in Cox's recollection of Burnside's assessment of the enemy and their position.

"The Confederate defence of the passage was intrusted to D. R. Jones's division of six brigades, which was the one Longstreet himself had disciplined and led till he was assigned to a larger command. Toombs's brigade was placed in advance, occupying the defences of the bridge itself and the wooded slopes above, while the other brigades supported him, covered by the ridges which looked down upon the valley. The division batteries were supplemented by others from the enemy's reserve, and the valley, the bridge, and the ford below were under the direct and powerful fire of shot and shell from the Confederate cannon. Toombs's force, thus strongly supported, was as large as could be disposed of at the head of the bridge, and abundantly large for resistance to any that could be brought against it. Our advance upon the bridge could only be made by a narrow column, showing a front of eight men at

most; but the front which Toombs deployed behind his defences was three or four hundred yards both above and below the bridge. . . . Under such circumstances the Confederate position was nearly impregnable against a direct attack over the bridge; for the column approaching it was not only exposed at almost pistol range to the perfectly covered infantry of the enemy and to two batteries which were assigned to the special duty of supporting Toombs, having the exact range of the little valley with their shrapnel; but, if it should succeed in reaching the bridge, its charge across it must be made under a fire ploughing through its length, the head of the column melting away as it advanced, so that, as every soldier knows, it could show no front strong enough to make an impression upon the enemy's breastworks, even if it should reach the other side.

Burnside's view of the matter was that the front attack at the bridge was so difficult that the passage by the ford below must be an important factor in the task; for if Rodman's division should succeed in getting across there, at the bend of the Antietam, he would come up in rear of Toombs, and either the whole of D. R. Jones's division would have to advance to meet Rodman, or Toombs must abandon the bridge. In this I certainly concurred, and Rodman was ordered to push rapidly for the ford."13

As previously noted, Cox was at Burnside's headquarters when McClellan's order to attack arrived. His action following receipt of Burnside's implementing directive are excerpted from the official record:

"Immediately the Eleventh Connecticut Infantry, Colonel Kingsbury commanding, was detailed from Rodman's division to deploy as skirmishers and drive the enemy from the head of the bridge. The column on the right (Crook's brigade, of the Kanawha Division, supported by Sturgis' division) was ordered to march under cover of the Eleventh Connecticut, and attempt to carry the bridge by assault, deploying to right and left as soon as the bridge should be

carried, and taking the heights above it. The column on the left (Rodman's division, supported by Ewing's brigade, of the Kanawha Division) was ordered to cross, if possible, by a ford about one-third of a mile below the bridge, take the heights above it, and join the column crossing the bridge.<sup>14</sup>

Antietam Battlefield Map 8 shows the movement and location of the 11th Connecticut and Crook's Brigade.

It should also be noted here that Rodman's division did not cross where Cox states but proceeded along to Antietam Creek for another two miles before crossing at Snavelly's Ford.

Cox filed this account of the attack by Crook's brigade to seize the bridge.

"Crook's position was somewhat above the bridge, but it was thought that by advancing part of Sturgis's men to the brow of the hill, they could cover the advance of Crook, and that the latter could make a straight dash down the hill to our end of the bridge. . . . Crook advanced, covered by the Eleventh Connecticut (of Rodman's) under Colonel Kingsbury, deployed as skirmishers. In passing over the spurs of the hills, Crook came out on the bank of the stream above the bridge and found himself under a heavy fire at short range. He faced the enemy and returned the fire, getting such cover for his men as he could and trying to drive off or silence his opponents. The engagement was one in which the Antietam prevented the combatants from coming to close quarters, but it was none the less vigorously continued with musketry fire. Crook reported that his hands were full and that he could not approach closer to the bridge."<sup>14</sup>

Antietam Battlefield Maps 8 and 9 at section VII show Crook's movements prior to and his regimental locations after the attack.

Crook's version of the attack does not coincide with Cox's.

"On the morning of the 17th instant I received orders from the general commanding corps to cross the bridge over Antietam Creek after General Sturgis had taken the bridge; but upon my arrival in the vicinity of the bridge I

found that General Sturgis' command had not arrived; so I sent the Eleventh Regiment ahead as skirmishers in the direction of the bridge, and conducted the Twenty-eighth Regiment above the bridge to reconnoiter the enemy's position, leaving the Thirty-sixth Regiment as reserve. After a labor of two hours, I succeeded in establishing two pieces of Simmonds' battery in a position to command the bridge. . . ."15

It is apparent from Crook's report that he did not see his mission in the same light as either General Burnside or General Cox. Both Cox and Burnside reported that Sturgis' second division was to support Crook's attack to seize the bridge. Crook's report indicates either he misunderstood Sturgis' part in the attack or he wanted to officially share the failure of his abortive attack. One can only assume that Cox, as Crook's temporarily displaced division commander, would have supported Crook's accounting if true; he clearly did not.

Cox continued his report:

"But on the failure of Crook's first effort, Sturgis ordered forward an attacking column from Nagle's brigade, supported and covered by Ferrero's brigade, which took position in a field of corn on one of the lower slopes of the hill opposite the head of the bridge. The whole front was carefully covered with skirmishers, and our batteries on the heights overhead were ordered to keep down the fire of the enemy's artillery. Nagle's effort was gallantly made, but it failed, and his men were forced to seek cover behind the spur of the hill from which they had advanced."16

The official history of the Sixth New Hampshire Regiment, one of four regiments in Nagle's brigade, provides this view of the second Union attack on the bridge.

"General Sturgis's Division was brought up, and ordered to take the bridge at all hazards and seize the heights beyond. The regiments selected for this desperate undertaking were the Sixth New Hampshire and the Second Maryland.

The two regiments were formed in a field below where the road came down to the creek, and some sixty or seventy rods below the bridge. Here they were

directly under the fire of the concealed enemy. The remainder of the brigade lay still farther down the stream, under cover of fences and corn-fields, too far away to support promptly the attacking column composed of the two small regiments already mentioned, each numbering only about one hundred and fifty men. The order of General Sturgis was to charge at once, so the regiments formed in line by the flank, side by side. They fixed bayonets, and, moving at the double-quick, passed through a narrow opening in a strong chestnut fence-which there was no time to remove-and charged in the most gallant manner directly up the road toward the bridge. As the attacking party, led by Colonel Griffin, debouched from the field into the road, the rebels, from their intrenched position, redoubled the fury of their fire, sweeping the head of the column with murderous effect. Of the first hundred men who passed through the opening in the fence, as least nine tenths were either killed or wounded. Such sweeping destruction checked, of course, the advancing column, but the men sheltered themselves behind logs, fences, and whatever other cover they could find, and bravely held the ground already gained."<sup>17</sup>

Brigadier General Nagle's report on the attack details the actions of the other regiments in his brigade.

"From [their] strong position the enemy poured a terrific fire upon our infantry, which was replied to in a very spirited manner by all the regiments in my brigade. The Forty-eighth Pennsylvania Volunteers, Lieutenant-Colonel Sigfried commanding, passed through a field skirted by a forest, in which the enemy was posted, and with the other regiments soon cleared it of the rebel sharpshooters, placed there in concealed positions. The Ninth New Hampshire Volunteers, Col. E. Q. Fellows, was placed near the bridge, and opened a destructive fire directly upon the enemy, and expended nearly all their ammunition during a gallant resistance of an hour, in which they were between the fires of two regiments of the enemy, and sustained themselves nobly. Lieut.

Col. H. B. Titus, of Ninth New Hampshire Volunteers, fell, badly wounded, at this point, with several of the commissioned officers of the regiment. The Second Maryland and Sixth New Hampshire Volunteers were placed in a perilous position near the bridge, and are entitled to commendation for their soldier-like bearing and bravery displayed.

When the most of the ammunition in my brigade was expended, my brigade fell back; the Second Brigade was ordered up to storm the bridge. . . .<sup>18</sup>

Antietam Battlefield Map 9 shows the disposition of Nagle's forces at 10:30 a.m. shortly before his brigade's abortive attack; Map 10 shows the regimental locations of the brigade following the attack at 12:15 a.m.

More than two hours had transpired since Burnside had received the attack order from General McClellan. In the following excerpt General Cox relates the concern and urgency now felt by Burnside.

"We were constantly hoping to hear something from Rodman's advance by the ford, and would gladly have waited for some more certain knowledge of his progress, but at this time McClellan's sense of the necessity of relieving the right was such that he was sending reiterated orders to push the assault. Not only were these forwarded to me, but to give added weight to my instructions, Burnside sent direct to Sturgis urgent messages to carry the bridge at all hazards."<sup>19</sup>

Burnside's order to carry the bridge at all cost was undoubtedly driven by the pressure he was receiving from General McClellan, a situation further exacerbated by the presence of McClellan's Inspector General, Colonel Delon B. Sackett, at Burnside's headquarters. Sackett had arrived at the Ninth Corps headquarters shortly after receipt of the 9:10 a.m. order to attack. Sackett recorded General Burnside's reaction to McClellan's message:

"McClellan appears to think I am not trying my best to carry this bridge; you are the third or fourth one who has been to me this morning with similar orders."<sup>20</sup>

The pressure exerted by McClellan to seize the bridge was compounded by Rodman's failure to report success in crossing the Antietam at a ford downstream. Although the precise time at which Rodman's Third division located and crossed Snively's Ford is unknown, the division's eventual linkup with other Ninth Corps forces which crossed Burnside's bridge at 1:00 p.m. would

dictate a crossing close to 12:30 a.m. The difficulty of the terrain between the original location of the division east of Buinside's Bridge and Snavelly's Ford undoubtedly contributed to their excessively slow movement as inferred in this passage from the official history of the Ninth New York Regiment which was assigned to Fairchild's brigade.

"The Third division was now led forward to the ford below, to force a crossing at that point. The Ninth reached the place after struggling through the tangled wood and over the debris of broken rock and fallen trees, and at once sprang into the water, the sharp-shooters upon the heights beyond disputing their efforts to cross. But the Zouaves pushed against the swift current, and scorning to halt for all other opposition, reached the opposite shore."<sup>21</sup>

For Burnside the situation was now getting desperate and his order direct to General Sturgis left no doubt that this time the bridge must be seized.

Cox described the attack:

"I directed Sturgis to take two regiments from Ferrero's brigade, which had not been engaged, and make a column by moving them together by the flank, the one left in front and the other right in front, side by side, so that when they passed the bridge they could turn to left and right, forming line as they advanced on the run. He chose the Fifty-first New York, Colonel Robert B. Potter, and the Fifty-first Pennsylvania, Colonel John F. Hartranft (both names afterward greatly distinguished), and both officers and men were made to feel the necessity of success. At the same time Crook succeeded in bringing a light howitzer of Simmonds's mixed battery down from the hill-tops, and placed it where it had a point-blank fire on the further end of the bridge. The howitzer was one we had captured in West Virginia, and had been added to the battery, which was partly made up of heavy rifled Parrott guns. When everything was ready, a heavy skirmishing fire was opened all along the bank, the howitzer threw in double charges of canister, and in scarcely more time than it takes to tell it, the bridge was passed and Toombs's brigade fled through

the woods and over the top of the hill. The charging regiments were advanced in line to the crest above the bridge as soon as they were deployed, and the rest of Sturgis's division, with Crook's brigade, were immediately brought over to strengthen the line. These were soon joined by Rodman's division, with Scammon's brigade, which had crossed at the ford, and whose presence on that side of the stream had no doubt made the final struggle of Toombs's men less obstinate than it would otherwise have been, the fear of being taken in rear having always a strong moral effect upon even the best of troops."<sup>22</sup>

The official history of the 51st Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers gives a vivid account of the actions which took place during the attack.

"As soon as Ferrero received the orders he vaulted into his saddle and commanded, Attention, second brigade! Quick as a flash the brigade was in line. He then rode up in front of the colors of the 51st P. V., and spoke to the men as follows: It is General Burnside's special request that the two 51sts take that bridge. Will you do it? The request was unlooked for, and the men had not had time to think of it, when Corporal Lewis Patterson, of Co. I, although a temperate man, exclaimed, Will you give us our whiskey, Colonel, if we take it? Col. Ferrero turned suddenly around to the corporal and replied, Yes, by G—, you shall all have as much as you want, if you take the bridge. I don't mean the whole brigade, but you two regiments shall have just as much as you want, if it is in the commissary or I have to send to New York to get it, and pay for it out of my own private purse; that is, if I live to see you through it. Will you take it? A unanimous Yes, went up that told of the determination of the men to take the bridge, not in anticipation of the whiskey, but to let Gen. Burnside know that his confidence in the twin regiments was not misplaced nor should be abused. After a few words in private by the regimental and brigade commanders, the 51st P. V. led the advance. Marching by the flank out to the road that went across the bridge, it turned



its back to the bridge and proceeded in the opposite direction from the objective point up the road to the top of the hill. All this time the regiment was receiving volley after volley of musketry, grape and shell from the rebel forces, on the opposite side of the creek. On reaching the top of the hill the regiment received orders. As each company clears the fence the command is 'by company into line,' and as the companies filed left through and over the fence, they complied with the order as it had been given. After the right of the regiment reached a clump of bushes on the top of the hill, the command to charge was given by Colonel Hartranft. In this field and a short distance from the base of the hill whereon the assaulting column was, a stone wall ran parallel with the creek, and close to its edge, ending abruptly at the abutment of the bridge. As the regiments made the charge, the company commanders discovered that it would be an impossibility for the two regiments to charge in a body across such an exceedingly narrow structure; they therefore changed their course from the entrance of the bridge to the stone wall along the creek. After reaching it they laid under cover of the wall and opened a terrific fire of musketry on the enemy, who were snugly ensconced in their rude but substantial breastworks, in quarry holes, behind high ranks of cordwood, logs, stone piles, &c., making it rather too hot a place for the enemy to be in, and too close for further resistance. They began to withdraw from their position by twos and threes, singly, and in whatever way they could with the most safety to themselves. The distance now between the opposing forces was only the width of the creek and a narrow wagon road on the enemy's side, being not over twenty-five yards. This was the nearest that the enemy had had the Yankees to them during the entire day of the Antietam battle, and they used every exertion known in military parlance to rid themselves of their now troublesome foe, but all in vain. The 51st P. V. and the 51st New York

withstood the incessant rain of solid shot, shell, grape and minies with heroic fortitude and a firmer resolution that the bridge must and should be theirs.

Captain Allebaugh, who commanded Co. C, (the color company,) now resolved that the time had come to take the bridge, and the regiment prepared for the final struggle that was either to make them the victors or the vanquished. Colonel Hartranft gave the final orders for the successful accomplishment of the desperate task which now lay before it. As the regiment made the charge, Captain Allebaugh led his company at double-quick towards a gateway leading out of the field into the road that crossed the bridge, but on nearing the gate his company became the target of the concentrated fire of the enemy on the opposite side of the stream. Here his first lieutenant was struck down and his men were falling at every step. He soon perceived his perilous situation and flew off at a tangent by right oblique, and made a short detour from the gate to the abutment of the bridge, and rushed across the bridge, - only himself, the three colorbearers, one color-guard and his first sergeant, William F. Thomas. These six men were the first to cross the bridge, but the remainder of the regiment followed close on their footsteps and so choked up the entrance to it that a halt was necessarily made on the stone structure. The enemy now deserted their works and scattered and scampered over the hills like a huge drove of scared sheep. The men of the two 51sts were helping their fleeing enemy in their flight by incessant volleys of musketry. Some few who would not risk running out from behind their works in such a storm of leaden hail, surrendered by sticking pieces of newspaper on the end of their rammers and holding them up above the works as a flag of truce. They were all taken prisoners, while the grand achievement was now a thing of the past, and the stubbornly contested bridge was ours, with the aid

of the sister regiment the 51st New York. Colonel Hartranft cheered on his men in the assault until he became so exhausted that he could not make himself heard, and as he reached the bridge he said, Come on, boys, for I can't halloo any more, but kept waving his hat in the air as encouragement to keep on across. His exhausted condition caused a great many to suppose that he had been wounded, but after the work was done, he calmly sat down on the bridge, and on inquiry it was found that he was all right. But not so with a host of other heroes, for the ground from the entrance on the road to the end of the bridge, was strewn with the heroic dead and wounded, the whole thing not occupying above twelve minutes after leaving the wall; yet in that time no less than twenty-nine were killed outright, and ninety-six wounded . . .<sup>23</sup>

The official reports rendered by Generals Burnside and Cox give the preponderance of credit for the seizure of Burnside's bridge to the two 51sts when, in fact, the 21st Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers also played a significant role in the successful assault. The history of the 21st Regiment includes this report.

"This artillery opened with canister to cover our advance, as the three regiments moved down upon the bridge with steady ranks, and taking position close along the stream, commenced a rapid fire by file upon the rebel cover. The first position taken by the 21st was to the left of the road, and on the left of the 51st Pennsylvania, who were directly in front of the bridge with the 51st New York on their right. The bank opposite the 21st was covered from the water's edge with a thicket of brush and trees, presenting a mass of foliage impenetrable to the eye: After firing from twenty to thirty rounds into the wall of shining leaves, into which six pieces of artillery were at the same time pouring canister over our heads, doubtless helping to keep the enemy quiet, but seriously wounding two of our men, the 21st were moved across the road to the right of the 51st New York, who were at the same time drawn in a little closer to the 51st Pennsylvania. This passage, of not more than five

hundred yards, was made by the flank on the double-quick through a withering fire from the rebel sharp-shooters, secure in their entrenchments, which dotted the field around us with little puffs of dust as the hissing bullets entered the ground; and the pierced bodies of more than twenty of our little band marked the path by which we had made it. On reaching our new position, we joined in with the two 51sts in a desultory sharp-shooting fire as the rebels showed their heads, for ten or fifteen minutes, keeping the enemy comparatively quiet. Then came the order to charge; the response was worthy Reno's old brigade; the color-bearers started on the run for the bridge (the colors of the 51sts side by side, and a hundred yards nearer the bridge than ours), and the three regiments with a fierce shout crowded towards the narrow passage; but before the colors of the two 51sts had touched the long disputed bridge the panic stricken rebels left their cover and fled, all but the devoted leader of their nearest regiment, who ran down to the edge of the bank, and with a cry of defiance shook his sword in the faces of our men for a moment, and then fell pierced by a dozen bullets. The bridge was won at last, and the veterans of Reno's old brigade are entitled unquestioned to the honor of its capture. The two 51sts immediately passed over the bridge without further opposition, while the 21st, who had nearly exhausted their ammunition in the heavy fusilade upon the peaceful foliage opposite our first position, were halted for a few minutes to allow the men to collect cartridges from the boxes of our dead and wounded; then we passed over the bridge which several thousand of our corps (infantry and artillery) were now hurrying to cross. When over the bridge the brigade, now joined by the 35th Massachusetts, took position in a ravine on the right of the road, which the rebels soon began to enfilade with artillery posted on high land on our right: a fragment of the first shell that I noticed pass down the ravine struck in the head and

instantly killed the gallant Lieutenant-Colonel Bell of the 51st Pennsylvania, a worthy companion in arms and command to its loved and distinguished commanded Colonel Hartranft.

The enemy, still firm and defiant in our front, maintained a strong line of battle behind the crest of the hill near the bridge, and but a few hundred yards away; and by their sharp fire succeeded in preventing our artillery from getting into effective position on the rebel side of the creek, and most of it soon returned across the bridge.<sup>24</sup>

Undoubtedly, the artillery fires from Richardson's and Brown's batteries to the rear of Toomb's positions were effective in overwatching Toomb's withdrawal from the bridge.

The fourth and most inexperienced regiment in Ferrero's brigade was the 35th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers. Their history contains this description of the attack on Burnside's bridge.

"At length the order came for us to move forward. We descended the hill by the left flank, and passed between the stalks of tall corn on the level, meeting several men holding an arm or some member from which the red blood was dripping. The air was close and stifling. While this was being done, the following interesting conversation took place between General Sturgis and Lieutenant Hudson, aide: Colonel Ferrero wishes to know what to do with the regiments. Sturgis replied: Have him move those regiments (the three older ones) down to the stream immediately, and take the bridge! And what with this new Thirty-Fifth Massachusetts? Tell him to move it across the bridge and up the hill in line of battle. There must be no delay; General Burnside is waiting for this to be done now! Isn't that artillery aimed at the position? Yes; but that shall be stopped.

We reached the bank of the stream near a large spreading tree, where the water flowed dark and cool under the overhanging foliage. At this point the creek ran nearly from west to east. The opposite bank was high with an abrupt

rocky ascent, studded with trees, and completely commanding the side upon which we were. Here the regiment halted awhile; bundles were thrown off and piled, and a guard set over them; and bayonets were fixed. Not a shot was fired at us from the other bank, the enemy's attention being drawn to the fight above us, where the sounds of battle still continued, seeming to increase as we came nearer.

The country road ran up stream, close to the north bank of the creek, and was bounded on the northerly side by a fence and ploughed field, in which stood an old barn. Beyond the field and a fence, which formed its west boundary, was a wooded knoll, or two little knolls, facing the opening of the bridge, and behind these Nagle's men were posted. Colonel Ferrero ordered the Fifty-First Pennsylvania to move forward by the right flank to Nagle's position, then down with a yell and rush over the bridge. The Twenty-First Massachusetts was placed in a ploughed field along the fence bounding the road, and ordered to open fire at the enemy across the creek; which they did warmly. Company A of our regiment was detailed to take position on the left of the Twenty-First, and commence firing in the same manner. The Fifty-First, but at right angles to it, facing up stream towards the bridge. The Fifty-First Pennsylvania proceeded as ordered, made a dash from the knoll to the opening of the bridge, stopped there and commenced firing. Our artillery was aimed at the further end of the bridge, and had to be quieted before the Fifty-First could proceed.

Colonel Ferrero moved diagonally across the ploughed field to behind the knolls, and the Thirty-Fifth followed. Colonel Ferrero sent Lieutenant Hudson from the knolls to Colonel Hartranft, commanding the Fifty-First Pennsylvania, to ask why he did not cross the bridge at once. Colonel Hartranft was found at the right parapet with his colors. When the order was communicated to him,

he said: Does he wish it? Yes, sir. Very well. The Fifty-First Pennsylvania then started, the men firing upwards and setting up a yell as a signal for our artillery to cease firing on the bridge. Lieutenant Hudson then asked Lieutenant-Colonel Potter, commanding the Fifty-First New York, to follow. He assented, and his regiment hurried after the Pennsylvanians. Most of our regiment, Company D being now the head of the column, had passed the fence near the knolls, when the shouting and din of the conflict, now close at hand to our left, was redoubled. It was the charge of the two regiments in accordance with the above orders. Colonel Ferrero said to Lieutenant Hudson: Hudson, tell your colonel to cross the bridge immediately, move along the road to the right, form in line and advance up the hill! The lieutenant did so.

Forward! came the order to us. Double quick! And we rushed around between the little knolls and out of the little grove, Lieutenant-Colonel Carruth leading, into an open space facing the entrance to a stone bridge with parapets, crossing the creek. Here was a startling scene of battle; clouds of smoke overhung; along the creek, below the bridge, the Twenty-First Massachusetts and our Company A were actively engaged with the enemy posted behind trees, rails and stones, upon the rocky acclivity across the stream; dead and wounded men in blue lay about, some still tossing and writhing in their agony; the bridge was filled with men of the Fifty-First Pennsylvania and Fifty-First New York, who had preceded us, some kneeling behind the parapets of the bridge and firing up at the gray coats, others crowding to the further end of the bridge and also firing upward.

Our regiment came partly into line, as if to open fire along the bank at the bridge; then, by the colonel's commands, swung by the right again and joined the throng hurrying on to the further bank, the third regiment to

cross. Confederate sharpshooters dropped or slid from the overhanging trees in which they had been hidden—one clinging to a branch the moment before he fell. It is said that Colonel Ferrero seized a musket and fired among them. In a shorter time than it takes to tell it we had crowded across the bridge and fled into the road to the right, where the two regiments which had preceded us were halted. The line of the regiment was formed quickly and steadily, facing the hill, which here rose more gently than below the bridge. Men in gray came down the hill, holding up both hands, or waving a dirty white rag, and were sent to the rear as prisoners. They belonged to Georgia regiments, of Toombs's Brigade, of General D. R. Jones's Division.

The halt here was but for a few moments; then the Thirty-Fifth was ordered forward up the hill, with a promise that other regiments should follow in support. Accordingly we advanced up the steep, climbing with difficulty the high rail fences, at first in line of battle, then swinging into column and moving by the right flank as we neared the top. The regiment reached the bare brow of the hill—the first to appear there—and moved some distance by the right flank to the higher part of the rise. Before us, towards Sharpsburg, the enemy were scattering back to their artillery upon the hills on the hither side of the town. The hostile battery, which we had been watching an hour before, now, close at hand, opened upon us at once, and sent the iron whizzing around us, shells taking effect in Companies D and H, cutting Luther F. Read in two, killing David W. Cushing, and severely wounding Lieutenant Baldwin.<sup>25</sup>

It was now 1:00 p.m. and the Ninth Corps had finally seized the Burnside bridge. Antietam Battlefield Map 10 shows the disposition of forces during the third and final attack to secure the bridge in the Ninth Corps zone. General Cox summarized the severity of the losses suffered by the Union Army during the three hours of continuous battle.



"It was now about one o'clock, and nearly three hours had been spent in a bitter and bloody contest across the narrow stream. The successive efforts to carry the bridge had been as closely following each other as possible. Each had been a fierce combat, in which the men with wonderful courage had not easily accepted defeat, and even, when not able to cross the bridge, had made use of the walls at the end, the fences, and every tree and stone as cover, while they strove to reach with their fire their well-protected and nearly concealed opponents. The lulls in the fighting had been short, and only to prepare new efforts. The severity of the work was attested by our losses, which, before the crossing was won, exceeded 500 men, and included some of our best officers, such as Colonel Kingsbury of the Eleventh Connecticut, Lieutenant-Colonel Bell of the Fifty-first Pennsylvania, and Lieutenant-Colonel Coleman of the eleventh Ohio, two of them commanding regiments. The proportion of casualties to the number engaged was much greater than common; for the nature of the combat required that comparatively few troops should be exposed at once, the other remaining under cover."<sup>26</sup>

In his book, Grape and Cannister, the author L. Van Loan Naisawald gives this excellent summary of the Federal artillery supporting the Ninth Corps attack:

"... the corps had four divisions, backed by eight batteries and a howitzer company of the 9th New York Infantry manning five Dahlgren boat howitzers. All told, the IX Corps had almost fifty tubes, and over and above these a number of the Reserve batteries was scattered along these same hills.

On the corps' right flank, south of the Middle Bridge, in good position to offer direct support, were the Reserve batteries of Taft and Von Kleiser, each with four 20-pounders, and the four 3-inch rifles of Weed's V Corps battery. South of these were Durell's and Clark's batteries of the corps' second division, and below these, opposite to the Lower Bridge, the balance of

the corps' guns, including the superb Regular battery of 20-pounders under Lt. Benjamin. This was the same Lt. Benjamin who had been present as a rookie battery officer at First Bull Run. A New Yorker, a graduate of West Point in the spring of 1861, the youngster had learned fast, and by the war's end he won the Medal of Honor for his service.

Early in the morning some of the Gray gunners in front of Sharpsburg caught some sprawling lines of idle IX Corps infantry in the open, and with vicious fire forced them away from the creek. This harassing fire forced Rodman on the corps' right to pull his division further to the rear, and to start Benjamin's 20-pounders banging away in reply."<sup>27</sup>

The quantity of harassing artillery fire shot by Union batteries was eventually to have an adverse impact on their ability to provide continuous fire support once the bridge was seized.

"Benjamin's guns had flung a fair number of rounds on the previous day, and as the hours wore on the lieutenant had replenished his depleted stocks from the ammunition train. Now, as this morning grew toward noon, Benjamin's guns had taken another healthy bite into their stocks; once more resupply from the train was sought. But an alarming situation had developed. So furious had been the firing by all of the 20-pounder units in the Army that the ammunition train was almost out of this caliber. The best Benjamin could do was to bring back forty rounds. His battery would end the day furiously firing blanks, on Burnside's order to give the impression they were still doing damage."

Similarly, Durell's Independent Pennsylvania Battery was run out during the morning to drive away some enemy guns, whose accurate firing was dropping shells into Sturgis's division near the Lower Bridge. Weed's Regulars were already firing from the high bank overlooking the creek, and the Pennsylvanians swung in on their left. As Durell's cannoneers were bending to their

task, a small, grizzled officer wearing a brigadier general's star trotted up. In a soft almost girlish voice he cautioned Durell to take his time and to fire slowly and deliberately; rapid fire was a waste of ammunition. Knowing cannoneers whispered to their friends that he was Gen. Hunt. Satisfied, the chief-of-artillery spurred his horse down the ridge toward the next battery in line."<sup>28</sup>

THE CONFEDERATE DEFENSE AT THE BRIDGE—STOP TWO (Movement Time 15 Minutes)

From STOP ONE move north along the eastern side of the small valley in which you are now located. You will be contouring the lower slope of the high ground immediately to your right (east). Stop after you have walked approximately 300 meters. This should place you 100 to 150 meters short of the newly constructed bridge over the Antietam supporting the Sharpsburg-Rohrbach Road (STOP 1A). If you direct your attention to the northwest, looking up the valley leading to the Otto and Sherrick farms you can see on the high ground (1000 meters from your present position) beyond the Sherrick farm a distinctive grouping of coniferous trees located within the National Cemetery. It was on this high ground that Lee had positioned several artillery batteries. Throughout the battle these batteries were able to pour devastating enfilading fire on the Union forces attempting to cross the valley from the hill to your rear (east). Move from here due west to the bank of the Antietam. You should arrive at a point on the Antietam which is roughly opposite a small stream which enters Antietam Creek on the western side. (STOP 1B). This point is important for two reasons. First, it was here that the bulk of Crook's brigade was stopped enroute to the first unsuccessful attempt to seize the bridge. Second, if you look closely at the Antietam just south of its junction with the stream you will observe a ripple in the water which runs the width of the creek. This low water was a ford which was not initially identified but was used later by Crook's brigade to cross the Antietam once the bridge had been seized.

From here move directly back to and cross Burnside's bridge. Take the footpath to the left (south) that leads to the high ground which overlooks the bridge. The Park Service has constructed an observation point on the high ground from which the bridge, the forward slopes of the high ground on the opposite (Union) side and the Confederate artillery battery position approximately 300 meters to the south can be easily observed. Unfortunately, the shrubbery to the left of the observation platform will restrict your view to the north along Antietam Creek and the small valley which parallels the creek on the eastern side. During a discussion of the Confederate perspective of the battle for the bridge it is advisable to move to the left of the platform to gain an unobstructed view to the north.

You are now standing at the center of the positions occupied by the Confederate forces which were deployed to prevent the Union Army from crossing the bridge below.

The mission of securing this obvious crossing point was assigned to Brigadier General Robert Toombs. Toombs's brigade arrived at Sharpsburg on the morning of 15 September 1862. The disposition of his understrength force in defending the bridge is provided in his report of the battle.

"On that day I received orders from you to detail two regiments from my own brigade (the only one then with me), and to order them to Williamsport for the protection of the wagon-train, which left me with but two regiments only,

and one of those (the Second Georgia) was very small, having less than 120 muskets present for duty. With these two regiments I was ordered by you to occupy the most eligible position I could find on the Antietam River, near the bridge on the road to Harper's Ferry, in order to prevent the enemy from crossing the river. From this position I was ordered to fall back when it should become necessary by my right flank, and to hold a hill about 400 yards below the bridge and immediately on the river, as long as it might be practicable, and then to fall back and take position on your right in line of battle, with four other brigades of your command, about 600 or 800 yards in rear of the bridge. With these orders I took possession of the ground indicated in your orders on Monday, September 15, with the Twentieth Georgia Volunteers, commanded by Col. John B. Cumming, and the Second Georgia Volunteers, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Holmes (about 400 muskets strong), and both under the immediate command of Col. Henry L. Benning, commanding the brigade. . . .

The Antietam River runs comparatively straight from a point about 100 paces above the bridge to a point about 300 paces below the bridge, and then curves suddenly around a hill to a ford on a neighborhood road. About 600 yards to my right and rear the road from Sharpsburg to Harper's Ferry from the foot of the bridge over the Antietam turns suddenly down the river, and runs nearly upon its margin for about 300 paces; then leaves the river nearly at right angles. Upon examining the position, I found a narrow wood upon the margin of the river just above the bridge (an important and commanding position) occupied by a company of Texans from Brigadier-General Hood's command. I then ordered the Twentieth to take position, with its left near the foot of the bridge, on the Sharpsburg side, extending down the river near its margin, and the Second Georgia on its right, prolonging the line down to the point where the road on the other side from the mountain approached the river. This

required a more open order than was desirable, on account of the smallness of the regiments, both together numbering but a little over 400 muskets.

On Tuesday you placed under my command the Fiftieth Georgia (Lieutenant-Colonel Kearsse), numbering, I should suppose, scarcely 100 muskets. I ordered this regiment on the right of the Second Georgia, extending it in open order, so as to guard a blind plantation road leading to a ford (Snaveley's) between the lower ford before referred to and the right of the Second Georgia Volunteers.

On Tuesday evening I received notice of the withdrawal of the company belonging to Brigadier-General Hood's brigade from the position on Colonel Cumming's left, above the bridge, and was compelled to detail a company from the Twentieth to take its place.

On Wednesday morning I ordered a company from General Jenkins' brigade (whom you had placed under my command) to relieve this company from the Twentieth and occupy its position, that it might resume its position below the bridge. This order was not obeyed, and subsequently I placed the captain and one-half of this company between the Second Georgia and Fiftieth Georgia, and the other half, under a lieutenant, near the lower ford, to prevent or retard the passage of the enemy at this point. This command held its position with fidelity and firmness until withdrawn by my order. This position was important, and had been guarded by a cavalry regiment, with an infantry brigade in its rear, up to Tuesday evening, when both were removed to another position on the field of battle, and left the crossing unprotected, except by the small force I was thus enabled to place there. Finding that the battery belonging to my brigade (Captain Richardson) was placed too far in my rear to render me efficient service in defending the passage at the bridge, I applied to General Longstreet for another battery. He ordered Captain Eubank to report to me,

who was placed in my rear, about half-way between the river and Captain Richardson's battery and rendered efficient service as long as he remained in that position."<sup>29</sup>

The Confederate right to which Toombs belonged was commanded by General James Longstreet. This wing of the Confederate Army consisted of all elements south of the Sunken Road. In addition to Toombs meager force at the bridge Longstreet had employed the bulk D. R. Jones division in depth along the Hagerstown-Harpers Ferry Road south of Sharpsburg. Until 9:00 a.m. on 17 September, Longstreet also had the division of Major General John G. Walker under his command. Walker's division was employed to protect the Confederate right flank and specifically Snavelly's Ford. These initial dispositions are clearly shown at Antietam Battlefield Map 1.

General Jones's report of the battle makes it clear that Toombs, contrary to his own report, did not enjoy an independent divisional command.

"Our troops were marched to Sharpsburg, which we reached on the morning of the 15th. On this march Anderson's brigade was assigned to General Hood, to act as a rear guard, and General Toombs, with two regiments of his brigade, joined me, the balance of his brigade having been sent to Williamsport with wagons. My command took possession of the heights in front of and to the right of the town, being the extreme right of our whole line. I ordered General Toombs to defend the bridge over the Antietam Creek in front of me with the Second and Twentieth Georgia Regiments, re-enforced by half a company from Jenkins' brigade and the Fiftieth Georgia regiment, of Drayton's brigade. These re-enforcements took but small part in what ensued, from the nature of their position. The enemy appeared on the opposite side of the creek, and heavy artillery firing was kept up during the day, continuing also the 16th, with but little damage to my command."<sup>30</sup>

It should be noted that Robert Toombs was more of a politician than a soldier. Having served as one of Georgia's senators in the U. S. Congress prior to the war he was a strong advocate of states' rights and supported the secessionist movement. Upon secession he lost by only one vote in becoming the President of the Confederacy and prior to entering the military served as Jefferson Davis's Secretary of State. As can be seen by the tone of his report, Toombs was miffed by his lack of a divisional command at Antietam. In fact, in correspondence to his wife preceding the battle, Toombs expressed a

paranoid belief that there existed a conspiracy among the senior Confederate leadership directed against him.

General Walker's division arrived from Harpers Ferry sometime past noon on 16 September and was initially positioned forward along the Antietam and to the right of Toomb's Brigade. His specific employment of the division was as discussed below.

"At four in the afternoon I received an order from General Lee to move at 3 o'clock the next morning and take position with my division on the extreme right of his line of battle, so as to cover a ford of the Antietam, and to lend a hand, in case of necessity, to General Toombs, whose brigade was guarding the bridge over the Antietam called by the Federal writers Burnside's Bridge.

At daybreak on the 17th I took the position assigned to me, forming my line of battle on the crest of a ridge in front of the ford just mentioned. The ground, from my position to the creek, distant about five hundred yards, sloped gradually down to the crossing, just below which there was a wooded, bluff-like hill commanding the approach to the ford from the east. Here I posted a battalion of skirmishers."<sup>31</sup>

General Mumford's Confederate cavalry provided a screen from the right of Walker's division to the south toward Antietam Furnace for another one and one-half miles along the Hagerstown-Harpers Ferry Road.

Antietam Battlefield Maps 1 through 7 reflect the Confederate dispositions south and east of Sharpsburg prior to 9:00 a.m. on 17 September.

General Toombs' report to Brigadier General D. R. Jones in regard to his defense of the bridge follows.

"The enemy opened on my position with his artillery on Tuesday evening, and continued it until dark. The damage was but slight. My own skirmishers and the company from General Hood's brigade crossed the river, and were actively engaged with the enemy's skirmishers the most of this day.

On Tuesday night the enemy advanced his artillery and infantry much nearer my position, and on Wednesday morning threw forward his skirmishers and light infantry in greatly increased numbers, and before 8 o'clock drove in my



pickets and advanced with heavy columns to the attack of my position on the bridge. This position was not strong. The ground descended gently to the margin of the river, covered with a narrow strip of woods, affording slight protection to the troops. Its chief strength lay in the fact that, from the nature of the ground on the other side, the enemy were compelled to approach mainly by the road which led up the river for near 300 paces, parallel with my line of battle, and distant therefrom from 50 to 150 feet, thus exposing his flank to a destructive fire the most of that distance.

At between 9 and 10 o'clock the enemy made his first attempt to carry the bridge by a rapid assault, and was repulsed with great slaughter, and at irregular intervals, up to about 1 o'clock, made four other attempts of the same kind, all of which were gallantly met and successfully repulsed by the Twentieth and Second Georgia. The Fiftieth referred to, were on the right of the Second Georgia, rather below the main point of attack, and rendered little or no service in this fierce and bloody struggle. After these repeated disastrous repulses, the enemy, despairing of wrestling the bridge from the grasp of its heroic defenders, and thus forcing his passage across the river at this point, turned his attention to the fords before referred to, and commenced moving fresh troops in that direction by his left flank. The old road, by the upper of the two fords referred to, led over a hill on my right and in my rear, which completely commanded my position and all ingress and egress to and from it below the bridge. My communications with the rear above the bridge were beset with other, but scarcely less, difficulties."<sup>32</sup>

The count of five separate Union attacks referred to in Toombs' report obviously does not coincide with Union reports of three attacks. This disparity is most likely accounted for in that there really was little to distinguish one attack from another since they followed so closely in succession. What was considered two separate attacks by the Confederate defenders could easily have been a single attack separated by a momentary pause from the Union perspective.

It is important to note here that the fords to which General Toombs refers are Snively's Ford and another approximately 500 meters to the east. The 2nd Georgia Regiment was positioned to focus its forces on the latter of the two fords. Until 9:00 a.m. elements of General Walker's division were positioned to cover Snively's Ford. At 9:00 a.m., however, General Walker's division was moved by General Lee to support General Jackson's forces on the Confederate left. General Walker's move is noted here.

"About 9 o'clock an order was brought by a staff-officer of General Lee, directing me to hurry to the left to reinforce Jackson, who was being hard pressed. Hastily recalling my skirmishers, I hurried forward, left in front, along the rear of the whole Confederate line of battle."<sup>33</sup>

Brigadier General Jones's account of the battle for Burnside's Bridge was provided in his report to General Longstreet.

"Daylight of September 17 gave the signal for a terrific cannonade. The battle raged with intensity on the left and center, but the heavy masses in my front—repulsed again and again in their attempts to force the passage of the bridge by the two regiments before named, comprising 403 men, assisted by artillery I had placed in position on the heights—were unable to effect a crossing, and maneuvered as if about to cross below at some of the numerous fords. My command had been further reduced on the right by detaching Garnett's brigade to the front of the town, leaving me, for the defense of the right, with only Toombs' two regiments, Kemper's Drayton's and Walker's brigades.

When it is known that on that morning my entire command of six brigades comprised only 2,430 men, the enormous disparity of force with which I contended can be seen."<sup>34</sup>

General Longstreet's recollection of this phase of the battle provides valuable insight and detail as to the initial disposition of Toombs' force, his planned withdrawal and the positioning of artillery to support the infantry defense of the bridge.

"Toombs had in his line of infantry five hundred and fifty men part way up the swell of Sharpsburg Heights. Behind him he posted Eubank's battery,

and overlooking were J. B. Richardson's and Eshleman's to rake the bridge; others near. The road on the Union side leading to the bridge runs parallel to the river about three hundred yards before it reaches the bridge, and turns up-stream after crossing. On the parallel to this line of march on the Confederate side Toombs posted his infantry, the South Carolina company in a marginal woodland above the bridge. Above and near the bridge was a fording-place for infantry; a thousand yards below was a practicable ford for infantry and artillery, by a country road. Toombs's orders were, when dislodged, to retire south so as to open the field of fire to all the troops on the heights behind him, the fire of his batteries to be concentrated upon the bridge, and his infantry arranged for a like converging fire. The ravines cutting the swells of the foot-hills gave him fair ground for retreat when he found his position no longer tenable. He was to so manoeuvre as to have a flank fire on the advancing columns, and gradually encircle so as to join his division after passing the crest."<sup>35</sup>

General Toombs's description of the battle for the bridge and the fords to his right continues.

"This approach [to the two southern fords] could have been very successfully defended by a comparatively small force, and it was for this purpose that I so often and urgently asked the aid of a regiment on the day of the battle, not having another man available for that purpose. Not being able to get any re-enforcements for the defense of these two fords, and seeing that the enemy was moving upon them to cross, thus enabling him to attack my small force in front, right flank, and rear, and my two regiments having been constantly engaged from early in the morning up to 1 o'clock with a vastly superior force of the enemy, aided by three heavy batteries, the commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Holmes, of the Second, having been killed in the action, and the only remaining field officer, Major [Skidmore] Harris, being

painfully wounded, and fully one-half of this regiment being killed or wounded, and the Twentieth having also suffered severely in killed and wounded, and the ammunition of both regiments being nearly exhausted, and Danks battery having been withdrawn to the rear nearly two hours before, I deemed it my duty, in pursuance of your original order, to withdraw my command, and place it in the position designated by you opposite the two lower fords, some half a mile to the right and front of your line of battle. In pursuance of this order, Colonel Benning, who had commanded the remnant of the brigade during the action with distinguished gallantry and skill, withdrew these gallant regiments to their new position, ready again to confront and battle with the enemy. The Fiftieth Georgia and the company from General Jenkins' brigade were at the same time ordered to the same position, and were led back by their respective officers. This change of position was made to my entire satisfaction, and with but small loss, in the face of greatly superior numbers. Before these troops had reached their new position, the Fifteenth Georgia Volunteers, under the command of Colonel Millican; the Seventeenth, under the command of Captain [John A.] McGregor, of my brigade, and Major Little, with five companies of the Eleventh Georgia (Colonel Anderson's brigade), all of whom had been detached several days before to guard ammunition and other trains, arrived on the field and were also placed in the new position before designated. The Twentieth and Second were then ordered to the ammunition train to replenish their cartridge boxes."<sup>36</sup>

Colonel Henry L. Benning's notes on his part in the battle for Burnside's Bridge provide some interesting insights as to the fordability of Antietam Creek and the human factor of war.

". . . at Sharpsburg he [Toombs] had only one regiment of Drayton's brigade, the Fiftieth Georgia; five companies of the Eleventh Georgia, of Anderson's brigade, and his own brigade. The rest of the division was immediately under General Jones. Two regiments of Toombs's brigade, Fifteenth

and Seventeenth, and the five companies of Eleventh Georgia, had been sent off after the enemy's cavalry that had escaped from Harpers Ferry, so he was reduced to the Second and Twentieth Georgia under my command, the former having about 120 or 130 men and officers, and the latter about 220 or 230, and to Kearsse's regiment, Fiftieth Georgia, consisting of from 130 to 150. Besides, he had Richardson's battery, four guns.

The Second and Twentieth held the bridge until 1 o'clock P. M. The Fiftieth on their right left its position. The enemy about 1 o'clock advanced a very long line, with its centre about opposite the bridge and the flanks far beyond ours. These flanks, having nothing to oppose them in their front, waded the creek, which, though wide, was shallow, and came around to envelop the Second and Twentieth. I then ordered them back. In fact, their ammunition was exhausted.

Lieutenant McCrimmon, of the Twentieth Georgia, with sixteen men, not all under him, was captured at the mouth of the bridge, the enemy who had waded the creek above coming in behind them to their surprise, while occupied with the enemy in front at the other end of the bridge. When the seventeen men surrendered, the enemy enraged were about to massacre them, saying they had fought too long against such odds. A colonel rode upon the bridge and remonstrated with the men and mollified them, and then sent the prisoners under guard to General Burnside's headquarters. As they marched off, this colonel rode down to the water's edge to let his horse drink; whilst there a shell from one of our guns burst near him and killed him.<sup>37</sup>

While time does not permit the tour to include a stop at Snively's Ford an account of the movement of Rodman's division with Ewing's attached brigade from the Kanawha Division against the Confederate right flank is nevertheless necessary to fully understand the battle as it evolved from this point. The movement of Rodman's Division can be traced on Antietam Battlefield Maps 7-11.

Brigadier General Cox's book on his Civil War experiences provides a summary background for the action at Snively's Ford.

"It is important to remember, however, that Walker's Confederate division had been posted during the earlier morning to hold that part of the Antietam line, supporting Toombs as well, and it was probably from him that Rodman suffered the first casualties that occurred in his ranks. But . . . Walker had been called away by Lee only an hour before, and had made the hasty march by the rear of Sharpsburg to fall upon Sedgwick. If therefore Rodman had been sent to cross at eight o'clock, it is safe to say that his column, fording the stream in the face of Walker's deployed division, would never have reached the further bank,—a contingency that McClellan did not consider when arguing, long afterward, the favorable results that might have followed an earlier attack. As Rodman died upon the field, no full report for his division was made, and we only know that he met with some resistance from both infantry and artillery; that the winding of the stream made his march longer than he anticipated, and that, in fact, he only approached the rear of Toombs's position from that direction about the time when our last and successful charge upon the bridge was made, between noon and one o'clock."<sup>38</sup>

Rodman's division was led in its movement around the Confederate right flank by Colonel Fairchild's brigade which included the Ninth New York Regiment and Hawkin's Zouaves, the 89th New York Regiment and the 103rd New York Regiment. Colonel Fairchild's report on this phase of the battle follows.

"The brigade then moved by the left flank down to the ford; crossing the creek, and forming in the woods, advanced and took a position opposite the bridge; there formed line of battle on the crest of the hill in the rear of —Battery, remaining in position under a heavy fire of shell. Though the fire was severe, the brigade remained firm in its position for nearly an hour, until ordered to advance."<sup>39</sup>

The unnamed battery to which Colonel Fairchild refers was Captain Whiting's Dahlgren Boat Howitzers, which were attached to the Ninth New York Volunteer Regiment.

The regimental history of the Ninth New York gives a more detailed account of its actions once across the Antietam at Snively's Ford.

"The Ninth then attempted to ascend the rocky and wooded cliff directly in their front, but their efforts in that direction were unavailing; for they had not proceeded far, when towering rocks that could not be scaled confronted them, and the regiment, therefore, was broken into detachments and sent to the right and left, in order to drive therefrom any rebels that might be secreted in the wood; and in this manner, after overcoming many difficulties, they gained the summit, and effected a junction with the troops who had just forced the bridge and carried the heights, beyond it by a murderous assault. A number of rebels, wounded, no doubt, by company K's shell, had been deposited by their comrades upon a stack of straw, which had taken fire when the pickets and sharpshooters were dislodged. Some of them were literally roasted alive, when the advent of the Union troops saved the others from a like fate."<sup>40</sup>

A more personal record of the Ninth New York's crossing at Snively's Ford is found in the narrative of David Thompson, a member of the regiment when it fought at Antietam.

"Then we were ordered over a ford which had been found below the bridge, where the water was waist deep. One man was shot in midstream. At the foot of the slope on the opposite side the line was formed and we moved up through the thin woods. Reaching the level we lay down behind a battery which seemed to have been disabled. There, if anywhere, I should have remembered that I was soaking wet from the waist down. So great was the excitement, however, that I have never been able to recall it. Here some of the men, going to the rear for water, discovered in the ashes of some haystacks which had been fired by our shells the charred remains of several Confederates. After long waiting it became noised along the line that we were to take a battery that was at work several hundred yards ahead on top of a hill. This narrowed the field and brought us to consider the work before us more attentively."<sup>41</sup>

Colonel Harland's Second Brigade from Rodman's division followed Fairchild's First Brigade to Snavelly's Ford. An extract from Harland's report which is included here begins following the first unsuccessful attack on Burnside's Bridge. This attack involved one of his regiments, the Eleventh Connecticut, which did not accompany the remainder of the brigade on its movement to Snavelly's Ford.

"I then sent out two companies of skirmishers from the Eighth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers to discover, if possible, a ford by which the creek could be crossed. After the ford was found, I followed in the rear of the first Brigade for the purpose of crossing the creek. I sent an aide-de-camp to bring the Eleventh Regiment Connecticut Volunteers to join the rest of the brigade, who reported that the regiment was not in the position in which it was left, and that he was unable to find it. I saw nothing more of the Eleventh Regiment Connecticut Volunteers until about sunset, when I met the remnant of the regiment near the bridge.

General Rodman ordered me to detach one regiment for the support of the battery belonging to the Ninth New York Volunteers, and to send the remaining regiments of the brigade across the creek in rear of the First Brigade, and, when I had placed the regiment in proper position, to join the balance of the brigade. I found the battery on the hill just below the ford. I detached the Eighth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers, placed it in what I considered the strongest position for the defense of the battery, and then crossed the ford. I found the rest of my command placed behind a stone wall, with orders from General Rodman to wait there for orders.

Shortly after my arrival the enemy opened an enfilading fire from a section of a battery which had been placed on our left flank. In order to protect the men, I moved the command more to the right, behind the crest of a hill, and awaited in that position the orders of General Rodman. While in this position the Eighth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers rejoined the brigade, and I moved still more to the right in the direction of the bridge, and halted



in the woods, just under the brow of the hill. From this point I was conducted by an aide of General Rodman, and placed in position in the rear of the First Brigade."<sup>42</sup>

In all likelihood the enemy battery to which Colonel Harland refers was that of Captain Eshleman, which had been displaced to its new position overwatching Snavelly's Ford between 10:30 a.m. and 12:15 p.m.

The regimental history from the Sixteenth Connecticut, one of the regiments in Harland's Brigade, includes this account of the movement to and crossing at Snavelly's Ford.

"At about nine o'clock the Sixteenth again formed and marched about a mile, first through a cornfield, and finally into a valley where they halted in an orchard. While passing through the cornfield the men stripped themselves of blankets, overcoats, and all luggage that would impede the progress of marching or the use of firearms. After filling our canteens from a brook near by, we marched up a steep hill that seemed almost impossible to surmount, then down on the other side and into Antietam river, which we forded and marched to a side hill. Soon in plain sight could be seen a rebel battery dashing intrepidly forward and planting itself directly in range of the Sixteenth." <sup>43</sup>

Again, the rebel battery to which the author is referring was probably Captain Eshelman's which after initially overwatching Toombs's position at the bridge was repositioned on high ground to the north and west of Snavelly's Ford. The timing of their movement as well as their positioning to cover Snavelly's Ford would coincide with the approximate time of crossing of the Sixteenth Connecticut and the report above.

A more detailed report was recorded by the Fourth Rhode Island in their regimental history. The Fourth Rhode Island was the fourth and last regiment in Colonel Harland's brigade.

"Our regiment, with other troops, was then ordered to cross the creek below the bridge, with the intention of flanking the enemy on their right and rear, to assist the direct assault on the bridge. By marching to our left through the woods we reached the ford, near the Snavelly house, about a mile below the bridge, and forded the stream, breast deep, to the enemy's side. The

Fourth was the first to cross; when and where other of our regiments crossed I do not personally know; I presume others subsequently crossed the creek at the same ford. While fording the creek we were greeted by a scattering fire from the Confederate skirmishers, from the neighborhood of the Snively house and from the protection of a stone wall some little distance from the bank of the creek, but with little effect. Throwing our skirmishers forward and speedily following with the regiment, it was short work to clear the positions mentioned of the enemy and to possess and hold the line of the stone wall, although a Confederate battery soon opened upon us from a distance towards Sharpsburg, and some sharpshooters evidently used us as a target. Orders soon withdrew us to the right near the creek.

The appearance of our forces on the right flank of the enemy evidently accomplished the desired result, for the attack upon the bridge was at length successful; the bridge was carried and a free way over it opened to the further side of Antietam creek, the enemy falling back from their former line of defence."<sup>44</sup>

The stone wall referred to in this report runs parallel to Antietam Creek approximately 200 meters to the north. A review of Antietam Battlefield Maps 10 and 11 indicate that rebel skirmishers from the Fiftieth Georgia were repositioned to cover the crossing at Snively's Ford when it became apparent that sizable Union forces were moving toward the flank which had been left unprotected by the departure of General Walker's division at 9:00 a.m.

The First Brigade of the Kanawha Division which was commanded by Colonel Hugh Ewing followed the initial movement of Rodman's division toward Snively's Ford, but crossed at another ford approximately 600 meters east of Snively's. The First Brigade consisted of three Ohio regiments; the Twelfth, Twenty-Third and Thirtieth. While the brigades moved with Rodman's division it remained under the control of its acting division commander, Colonel Eliakin P. Scammon.

An extract from the official report by Colonel C. B. White, Commander of the Twelfth Regiment Ohio Volunteer Infantry follows.

"At 2 a.m. of the 17th I moved the regiment to the left and front of the bridge over Antietam, and in line with the Twenty-third and Thirtieth, and in

supporting distance of McMullin's battery. We occupied this position from one to two hours, when we moved with the brigade, under command of Colonel Ewing, to a ford about 1 mile down the stream. While fording the stream the enemy opened on the column with artillery, fortunately inflicting but little injury. After crossing the stream, we moved up along its bank to the left and front of the bridge over Antietam, to within supporting distance of General Rodman's division. While lying in this position the enemy shelled us severely for about two hours."<sup>45</sup>

With Rodman's division across the Antietam at Snively's Ford and Sturgis's Second Division leading the remainder of the Ninth Corps across Burnside's Bridge the Union Ninth Corps now had a strong foothold on the rebel side. Toombs's brigade had suffered numerous casualties during his defense of the bridge and with his ammunition running dangerously low his position was no longer tenable. Shortly after 1:00 p.m. he began his withdrawal to the positions east of the Harpers Ferry Road previously directed by General Jones.

The adjusted disposition of Toombs's brigade, their supporting artillery position and withdrawal routes are shown on the Antietam Battlefield Maps 10 and 11 respectively.

To give a better appreciation for the contributions made by Confederate artillery in support of Toombs, you will now move to the position occupied by a Virginia artillery battery from Colonel S. D. Lee's battalion which was commanded by Captain J. L. Eubank.

EUBANK'S ARTILLERY BATTERY POSITION-STOP THREE (MOVEMENT TIME 5 MINUTES)

From your current location at the overlook position on the Confederate side of Antietam Creek above Burnside's Bridge move to the asphalt walkway to your right (south) and proceed west to the McKinley Monument approximately 50 meters up this path. Once at the monument you will see a dirt farm road which extends south from the parking area. Proceed south on the farm road for approximately 300 meters. You will be moving gradually uphill as you walk. After you have walked 300 meters move off the farm road and walk due west for another 50 meters. This will place you in the vicinity of the battery commanded by Captain Eubanks.

Captain Eubank's Virginia Battery had been detached from Colonel S. D. Lee's artillery battalion to support Toombs' defense of Burnside's Bridge, as indicated in S. D. Lee's official report.

"The battalion crossed the Antietam about 8 a.m. September 15, and, in obedience to orders from General Longstreet, with the exception of Eubank's battery, took position on the bluffs to the left of the pike, facing the Antietam. Eubank's battery, in compliance with a written order of General Longstreet, held by the adjutant-general of Toombs' brigade, was sent to report to General Toombs at the lower bridge, and remained with his brigade until the army recrossed the Potomac. Nothing of interest occurred during the morning."<sup>46</sup>

At least part of this report does not coincide with a comment made by General Toombs insofar as Eubank's support throughout the battle is concerned. Toombs stated that Eubank's battery moved from its position sometime after 10:30 a.m. This would have left Toombs devoid of some of his most effective artillery supporting the Confederate defense of the crossing at the bridge. Since Captain Eubank filed no report and the Antietam Battlefield Maps fail to record his subsequent position (and they fail to show that he remained in position even until 10:30 a.m. as reported by Toombs), it is unclear why he left when he did, who directed his relocation and where he displaced to. This lack of knowledge concerning Eubank's battery is further supported by S. D. Lee's observation in his report.

"Captain Eubank's battery not being with me, I am not prepared to speak from personal observation of his action, but General Toombs informed me that he and his company did good and gallant service."<sup>47</sup>

It is obvious that during the period in which Eubank's battery occupied this position it was able to provide effective artillery support to Toombs' brigade overlooking the bridge. From this position the artillery would have been able to direct devastating fire on the Union infantry as it approached the bridge from either the right or left along the valley paralleling Antietam Creek. But, if Eubanks displaced his battery by 10:30 a.m., it is possible he was available only to support Toombs' defense of the first major Union attack.

The trees now lining the west bank of the Antietam along which the Twenty-Ninth Georgia Regiment was deployed are substantially taller than those which grew in the same location in 1862. Consequently, a contemporary view of this aspect of the battlefield would suggest that gunner visibility would be significantly impaired by such a growth of trees. However, this was not the situation over 100 years ago.

One possible answer to the question concerning Eubank's displacement of his battery may be that the position was (assuming no sizeable stand of intervening trees) clearly visible to Union forces on the ridge across the Antietam on which the preponderance of the Ninth Corps artillery was located. An examination of Antietam Battlefield Maps 6 through 9 shows that Randall's battery was oriented directly toward Eubank's position. Under these circumstances it is somewhat logical to posit that Eubanks was forced to withdraw once his position was identified by Union gunners on the east side of the Antietam. The fact remains that Eubank's battery was not available to support Toombs' brigade at its most critical juncture.

However, Eubank's battery was not the only artillery supporting Toombs' brigade. On the high ground immediately west of Toombs' position were posted the batteries of Captain Richardson and Captain Eshleman from Colonel J. B. Walton's Washington Artillery. Their specific positions were approximately 400 meters north-northwest from where you are now standing and directly in line with the National Cemetery at a distance of 1300 meters.

In his report to General Lee, Colonel Walton had this to say about the actions of both of these batteries:

"... in front of General D. R. Jones' position, were placed the second company, Capt. J. B. Richardson, Lieutenants Hawes, Britton, and DeRussy, with two Napoleons and two 12-pounder howitzers, and fourth company, Capt. B. F. Eshleman, Lieutenants Norcom, Battles, and Apps, with two 6-pounder bronze guns and two 12 pounder howitzers. . ."48

He continued.

"Captain Richardson engaged the enemy in his front with the two Napoleons of the second company until 1 p.m., when one of his guns was disabled by a shot from one of the three batteries that had been playing upon him, and he

withdrew through the town of Sharpsburg and joined his section of howitzers on the right and rear."<sup>49</sup>

Insofar as Captain Eshleman's battery was concerned, Walton had this to say.

"The fourth, under Eshleman, was not idle during this eventful day when the battalion was so actively and effectually employed. About noon on the 17th he was directed by General Jones, in front of whose position he was placed, to remove his battery to a position to guard the ford below the bridge held by General Toombs. The battery was placed in position between the Blackfold House and the ford, and opened fire upon the enemy, who were crossing in force. A long-range battery of the enemy on the opposite bank of the stream opened upon and enfiladed his guns, and he was compelled to retire, not, however, before he had driven the enemy back from the ford. He then received orders from General D. R. Jones to hold the enemy in check, if possible, until the arrival of General A. P. Hill, whose division was near at hand. The enemy soon made another attempt to cross with infantry and cavalry. Captain Eshleman took a position nearer the ford, and, under cover of a hill which protected him from the enemy's battery, opened fire upon him with case and shell."<sup>50</sup>

Eshleman's battery was displaced to a ridgeline approximately 900 meters west, southwest of your current location (see Antietam Battlefield Map 10).

Now you need to switch hats and think Union. From this vantage point it is possible to see most of the terrain on which the extreme left of the Union Ninth Corps was deployed by 3:30 p.m. as it prepared to continue its assault against the Confederate forces under D. R. Jones which occupied the high ground along the Harpers Ferry Road. Please refer to Antietam Battlefield Map 12.

At 3:30 p.m., the terrain on which you are now standing was now occupied (between 1:30 and 3:30 p.m.) by Battery A, Fifth United States Artillery commanded by Lieutenant Charles P. Muhlenberg. Its general orientation was to the west, northwest. This battery was supporting Rodman's Third Division.

Harland's First Brigade of Rodman's division was deployed in the low ground almost due west of this location and on a line roughly parallel to the Harpers Ferry Road. The brigade had moved to this position following the general trace of the valley which extends due north from Snavelly's Ford for approximately one kilometer. Specifically, the Fourth Rhode Island Regiment was on the brigade's (in fact the corps) extreme left. On line with and to the immediate right (north) was the Eleventh Connecticut Regiment and approximately 100 meters to their right and rear was the Eighth Connecticut Regiment. The latter was tied in and on line with Colonel Fairchild's First Brigade whose regiments were deployed on the forward slopes of the ridge which extends north-south and parallels the valley in which the bulk of the First Brigade then occupied.

The First Brigade of the Kanawha Division under Colonel Ewing was deployed in defilade along the eastern slopes of the high ground on which you now stand. Remember, Ewing's brigade had crossed the Antietam at a site east of Snavelly's Ford.

To gain a better appreciation for the continuation of the battle and to set the southern most troop positions of the Ninth Corps you should now move to STOP FOUR.

THE FIGHT ON THE NINTH CORPS LEFT FLANK - STOP FOUR (MOVEMENT TIME 10 MINUTES)

From your present position at the location of both Eubank's (Confederate) and Muhlenberg's (Union) batteries move due west back to the farm road. From the farm road look to the west. You will see a plowed field in front of you. In the summer this field may be planted with corn or some other grain. Select a low point at which to cross over the fence. Move to the north paralleling this fence until you come to a line of trees running basically east to west which separate this field from another immediately to the north. Follow this line of trees west to the high ground to your front approximately 300 meters distant. You should now be standing on a ridge which runs north to south. If you have not yet crossed over a wire fence which parallels the western slope of the ridge, do so. To the west and below you, there was a cornfield at the time of the battle. From this position we will discuss the actions of Rodman's division.

You are now at the left flank of the Ninth Corps' position just prior to their resumption of the attack toward the Harpers Ferry Road ridge to the northwest at 3:30 p.m.. The ridge south of Sharpsburg was defended by the brigades of Kemper, Drayton, Jenkins and Garnett from D. R. Jones' division.

Brigadier General Cox's reminiscences of the war provides a detailed summary of the disposition and actions of the Union forces now on the west bank of the Antietam.

"Our next task [upon seizing the bridge at approximately 1:00 p.m.] was to prepare to hold the heights we had gained against the return assault of the enemy which we expected, and to reply to the destructive fire from the enemy's abundant artillery. Light batteries were brought over and distributed in the line. The men were made to lie down behind the crest to save them from the concentrated cannonade which the enemy opened upon us as soon as Toombs's regiments succeeded in reaching their main line. But McClellan's anticipation of an overwhelming attack upon his right was so strong that he determined still to press our advance, and sent orders accordingly. The ammunition of Sturgis's and Crook's men had been nearly exhausted, and it was imperative that they should be freshly supplied before entering into another engagement. Sturgis also reported his men so exhausted by their efforts as to be unfit for an immediate advance. On this I sent to Burnside the request that Wilcox's



division be sent over, with an ammunition train, and that Sturgis's division be replaced by the fresh troops, remaining, however, on the west side of the stream as support to the others. This was done as rapidly as was practicable, where everything had to pass down the steep hill-road and through so narrow a defile as the bridge. Still, it was three o'clock before these changes and preparations could be made. Burnside had personally striven to hasten them, and had come over to the west bank to consult and to hurry matters, and took his share of personal peril, for he came at a time when the ammunition wagons were delivering cartridges, and the road at the end of the bridge where they were was in the range of the enemy's constant and accurate fire. It is proper to mention this because it has been said that he did not cross the stream. The criticisms made by McClellan as to the time occupied in these changes and movements will not seem forcible if one will compare them with any similar movements on the field; such as Mansfield's to support Hooker, or Sumner's or Franklin's to reach the scene of action. About this, however, there is fair room for difference of opinion: what I personally know is that it would have been folly to advance again before Wilcox had relieved Sturgis, and that as soon as the fresh troops reported and could be put in line, the order to advance was given. McClellan is in accord with all other witnesses in declaring that when the movement began, the conduct of the troops was gallant beyond criticism."<sup>51</sup>

Cox's explanation concerning the Ninth Corps' failure to immediately continue the attack once the west bank had been secured by comparing the failure of other major commanders to support the offensive actions of others at Antietam is a weak effort to obscure the fact that the Ninth Corps was simply unprepared to maintain the momentum of the attack. This was as much Cox's failure as Burnside's. In any event, the divisions' supporting logistic elements, especially ammunition trains, should have been displaced well forward early so as to provide rapid resupply when needed. This obviously did not occur and was a failure of the corps' senior leadership.

Antietam Battlefield Map 12 shows the disposition of forces described in Cox's continuing recollection of events.

"Wilcox's division formed the right, Christ's brigade being north, and Welsh's brigade south of the road leading from the bridge to Sharpsburg. Crook's brigade of the Kanawha division supported Wilcox. Rodman's division formed on the left, Harland's brigade having the position on the flank, and Fairchild's uniting with Wilcox at the centre. Scammon's brigade was the reserve for Rodman at the extreme left. Sturgis's division remained and held the crest of the hill above the bridge. About half of the batteries of the divisions accompanied the movement, the rest being in position on the hill-tops east of the Antietam."<sup>52</sup>

If you were here at 3:00 p.m. on 17 September 1862, you would see Harland's brigade with the Fourth Rhode Island Regiment below you in the valley about 150 meters to the southwest. To their right (north) and directly to the west in front of you would be the Sixteenth Connecticut Volunteer Regiment. Higher on the ridgeline as it extends to the right (north) would be Battery D, Pennsylvania Light Artillery, commanded by Captain George W. Durell. On the reverse side of the ridge to your rear (east) at a distance of 150 meters is the Eighth Connecticut Volunteer Regiment. Toombs' brigade has redeployed on line directly across the valley into the cornfield approximately 400 meters from your position. They have resupplied themselves with ammunition and have recently been joined by the regiments which were absent on escort duty earlier during the morning.

The activities from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. during which the Ninth Corps consolidated its positions on the west bank of the Antietam were described in Cox's official report.

"During the interval the enemy kept up an incessant cannonade, and having the exact range of the valley and the ravines, his shells came in very fast, annoying us a good deal and causing numerous casualties, notwithstanding the men were kept lying on the ground near the crests of the hill while the changes in the line and the partially new formation after the arrival of Wilcox's division were being made."<sup>53</sup>

Cox outlines the continuation of the attack at this point.

"At about 3 o'clock, the necessary changes in the line having been completed, the order to advance was received from General Burnside, and the whole force, except Sturgis' division, was put in motion. General Wilcox on the

right, his whole division in line and supported by Colonel Crook, was ordered to move on Sharpsburg, which lay about a mile distant to the right of our front. General Rodman, supported by Colonel Scammon, was ordered to move in the same direction, first dislodging the enemy from his front, and then changing direction to the right, bringing his command en echelon on the left of General Wilcox. The advance was partly covered by Simmonds', Muhlenberg's, Clark's, and Cook's batteries, the other batteries of the corps being in part out of ammunition, and part being necessarily kept in position on the commanding ground on the left bank of the stream. The troops moved forward in perfect order and with great enthusiasm . . . On the left, General Rodman and Colonel Scammon likewise advanced rapidly, driving the rebels before them. The enemy, however, were manifestly in much greater force than ours, and massed their troops heavily on the extreme left. This necessarily made the line of march of our left wing diverge from the course intended, and opened a gap between it and the right, which it was necessary to fill up by the troops of the second line. Batteries were accumulated against us upon the semicircular ridge in advance, and the advancing line was subject to a most trying and destructive cross-fire of artillery. The enemy now brought up still more fresh troops upon the left, and while General Rodman was making disposition to meet them by a change of front of a part of his command, he fell, desperately wounded by a ball through his breast. The loss of their commander at a critical period caused confusion in a portion of the division on the extreme left.

The Second Brigade of his division, Colonel Harland commanding, was forced to retire after an obstinate contest, in which they suffered terribly.

Colonel Scammon, of the Kanawha Division, being ordered to make dispositions of the brigade with him to oppose the rebel force on the left, caused

the Twelfth and Twenty-third Ohio Regiments to execute a perpendicular change of front, which was done with precision and success, the other regiment of the brigade (Thirtieth Ohio) maintaining its proper front. The whole line was now engaged, the supports being brought to the front, except the reserve division of General Sturgis at the bridge. This was now ordered up, and came promptly, though much exhausted and weakened by its previous exertions during the day."54

The massed enemy troops to whom Cox refers in the preceeding were rebel soldiers from A. P. Hill's division only recently arrived from a 17 mile forced march from Harpers Ferry. Lee committed Hill's men almost as they arrived on the scene to blunt the Ninth Corps by counterattacking their exposed left flank.

Colonel Harland, commanding the Second Brigade of Rodman's Third Division which was on the Ninth Corps' extreme left rendered this report of the attack. (Antietam Battlefield Map 13 shows the Ninth Corps movements at this time.)

"General Rodman ordered me to form on the left of the First Brigade, ready for an advance on the enemy. Major Lion, acting aide-de-camp, who went to the left of the line to carry my orders, on his return reported that a brigade of the enemy's infantry was forming on the left, which fact I reported to General Rodman. When the order was given by General Rodman to advance, the Eighth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers, which was on the right of the line, started promptly. The Sixteenth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers and the Fourth Regiment Rhode Island Volunteers, both of which regiments were in a cornfield, apparently did not hear my order. I therefore sent an aide-de-camp to order them forward. This delay on the left placed the Eighth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers considerably in the advance of the rest of the brigade. I asked General Rodman if I should halt the Eighth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers and wait for the rest of the brigade to come up. He ordered me to advance the Eighth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers, and he would hurry up the Sixteenth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers and the Fourth Regiment Rhode Island

Volunteers. I advanced with the Eighth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers and commenced firing. The Sixteenth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers and the Fourth Regiment Rhode Island Volunteers not coming up, I turned to see if they were advancing, and saw some infantry belonging to the enemy advancing upon our left flank. Knowing that if they were not checked it would be impossible to hold this part of the field, without waiting for orders, I put the spurs to my horse to hasten the arrival of the Sixteenth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers. My horse was almost immediately shot from under me, which delayed my arrival. I found that the Sixteenth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers had changed their front, by order of General Rodman. The line was formed facing to the left, and was nearly a prolongation of the enemy's lines, except that they faced in opposite directions. I immediately ordered Colonel Beach to change his front, so as to attack the enemy on the right flank. This change was effected, though with some difficulty, owing to the fact that the regiment had been in service but three weeks, and the impossibility of seeing but a small portion of the line at once.

Almost as soon as the change was effected, the right of the enemy's lines, which was concealed in the edge of the corn-field, opened fire. Our men returned the fire and advanced, but were forced to fall back. Colonel Beach rallied them and returned to the attack, but they were again driven back, this time out of the corn-field, beyond the fence. Here they were again rallied, but as it was impossible to see the enemy; and the men were under fire for the first time, they could not be held. The Eighth Regiment Connecticut Volunteers, which had held their position until this time, now, by order of Major Ward, commanding, moved more to the right, where they were sheltered in a measure from the fire in front, and changed front, so as to reply to the enemy on the left. After a few rounds, as most of the men were

out of ammunition, the order was given to fall back. On the road leading to the bridge I found part of the Eleventh Regiment Connecticut Volunteers. At the bridge I collected the shattered remnants of the brigade, in hopes of making a stand, but, owing to the large loss of officers and the failure of ammunition, it was impossible to render the men of any material service. I therefore conducted the brigade across the bridge, and bivouacked for the night in front of the position held by a portion of General Sykes' command.<sup>55</sup>

The official history of the Fourth Rhode Island Regiment which was on the extreme left of the Second Brigade contains a detailed and personalized account of this phase of the battle.

"Our regiment was formed on the extreme left of the line of battle and swept across the rolling fields under a lively fire, mostly from artillery, in the advance upon the Confederate lines. We met the enemy in a cornfield, where the thick, high grown corn served largely to conceal them from us, but where their position was demonstrated by their sharply challenging rifles. They occupied the crest of one of the numerous small rolling hills, with which that locality was covered, while we had reached its base. The interchange of fire between us was fierce and rapid, until suddenly there was a lull in their firing and plainly above them and over the waving corn floated our National flag, "the Star Spangled Banner." The cry ran down our line "We are firing on our own men." Our firing ceased, and, by order of the colonel, our flag was advanced up the hillside, but scarcely had it approached the summit when a withering fire was opened from the enemy's line . . . our firing was resumed with effective vigor.

The Fourth at that time was short of officers, and there were present at Antietam, of field officers, only the colonel and lieutenant-colonel. There was no adjutant, and few if any of the companies had more than two commissioned officers present. Colonel Steere sent the lieutenant-colonel (Curtis)

to the colonel of the regiment on our right, to ask him to join the Fourth in a charge upon the opposing line. That regiment had but just been organized, and this was its first experience in the field. It was badly broken, and, a little later under the impulse of the enemy's heavy fire, and possibly seeing what we also soon saw, retreated to the rear, breaking heavily through the right of our regiment. As I have said, the Fourth occupied the extreme left of our line. There were no other Union troops between our left and Antietam creek. We were left alone, nothing to right of us, nothing to left of us. The hot fire continued on both sides, the hottest I ever encountered, the bullets whistling around us like hives of loosened bees, until we saw a new complication. A Confederate line, in three ranks was sweeping down upon our unprotected left flank, scarcely a hundred yards away. As we afterwards learned, the enemy had just before been strongly re-enforced by Gen. A. P. Hill, fresh from his capture of Harper's Ferry; and the larger part of his division had been thrown upon their right to strengthen that part of their line and repel the vigorous attack of General Burnside. The official Confederate reports establish the fact that the forces of General Hill with others then occupied the line in our front with at least one of his regiments extending beyond our extreme left. We were about to be enveloped by the enemy, and the support, which had been called for, had not appeared. Colonel Steere recognizing the situation, and designing to withdraw the regiment by the right flank had scarcely given the order for that purpose, and directed Colonel Curtis to carry the order down the line, when he (Colonel Steere) fell, grievously wounded by a bullet in his hip. The regiment, consequently, failed to receive the order down the line, and the movement on the right in obedience to the order seemed to those toward the left like the breaking of the ranks, and the regiment was withdrawn from an untenable position in a

somewhat broken condition, but bearing its wounded colonel, Lieutenant Clarke of my company, who was so terribly wounded (twice shot through the body) that his subsequent survival seemed almost a miracle, and others of our wounded from the field, assured of the fact that only overpowering numbers and want of support had compelled the gallant Fourth to fall back. . . .

Our losses were severe. Of less than 400 engaged, the Fourth lost 102 killed and wounded, and seven taken prisoners. I received two shots through my clothing and a slight contusion on my hip from a bullet striking the swivel of my saber. Indeed, the Confederate fire was so sharp and heavy that I believe there was scarcely one of our officers or men engaged who did not bear the mark of at least one bullet upon some part of his clothing or equipments."<sup>56</sup>

The official history of the Sixteenth Connecticut Volunteer Regiment which was immediately to the right (north) of the Fourth Rhode Island Regiment recorded the battle as follows.

"It was half past three o'clock; the Fourth Rhode Island and the Sixteenth Connecticut were ordered into a cornfield, and they moved forward quite a distance in advance of the army at their right; we here laid down letting the shot and shell pass over us.

In the meanwhile the Division of A. P. Hill, which had arrived from Harper's Ferry, and joined Lee's army, were coming into this cornfield from the opposite side, unobserved; at the same time Company H, (Captain Barber,) had been thrown out in advance as a vidette to prevent being surprised. At four o'clock McClellan sent orders to Burnside to advance, and carry the batteries in his front at all hazards and at any cost. Burnside's corps was charging. General Rodman observed that the rebels were about to flank us and get in our rear, and ordered the Fourth Rhode Island, and Sixteenth Connecticut to swing to the left that we might face them, but at that particular moment



the rustling of cornstalks warned us that the rebels were on us. Colonel Beach gave the order 'Attention!' While this order was being executed a terrible volley was fired into us. Volley after volley in quick succession was hurled into our midst. The Sixteenth sprang up and returned the fire with good effect; some fixed bayonets, advanced, and were captured. The most helpless confusion ensued. Our men fell by scores on every side. Still our position was obstinately maintained, until ordered to fall back. The rebels discovered the disorder, and came on us in heavy column.

While we were falling back to cover near the bridge we were swept by a destructive cross-fire, and the rebels becoming entangled in this cross-fire extricated themselves and fell back to the stone wall. The Eighth, Eleventh, and Sixteenth Connecticut, and the Fourth Rhode Island, re-formed and were placed in position for defence."<sup>57</sup>

The Confederate view of this portion of the battle will be discussed at STOP EIGHT. Now let us turn our attention to the battle in the center of the Ninth Corps zone of attack.

ATTACK ALONG THE NINTH CORPS CENTER-STOP FIVE (MOVEMENT TIME 5 MINUTES)

From your present location return east across the fence and walk north along the ridge for approximately 300 meters. This should position you on a hilltop which is the high point of the ridge on which you are now walking.

By 3:00 p.m., The position at which you are now standing was occupied by Battery E, Fourth United States Artillery, commanded by Captain Joseph C. Clark, Jr. Immediately to his left (south) and also deployed on the ridgeline was Battery D, Pennsylvania Light Artillery, commanded by Captain George W. Durell. Both batteries were oriented to the west. Although these batteries were assigned to Brigadier General Sturgis' Second Division, they were employed immediately to the front of Colonel Fairchild's brigade from Rodman's Third Division (previously discussed at STOP FOUR). Sturgis' division was employed approximately 100 to 150 meters to the east of Fairchild's brigade with Colonel James Nagle's First Brigade on the left (south) and Brigadier General Ferrero's Second Brigade on the right (north). Further to the north and inclined to the east was Brigadier General Willcox's First Division which was oriented on the valley that extends east from Sharpsburg to the Antietam.

It should be noted at this point that prior to 10:30 a.m. the Second and Fourth Companies of the Washington (Louisiana) artillery occupied this same terrain in support of Toombs' brigade at the bridge. Between 10:30 a.m. and 12:15 p.m. the Fourth Company, commanded by Captain B. F. Eshleman was withdrawn from this position to the high ground approximately 900 meters to the southwest. This displacement was made to support Toombs' skirmishers covering Snively's Ford. To reinforce the remaining company, commanded by Captain J. B. Richardson, the rebels moved the Wise (Virginia) Artillery Battery, commanded by J. S. Brown, to a position just south of the Otto farmhouse sometime around noon. Richardson's battery was located 100 to 150 meters north of here and oriented on the bridge to which it maintained direct line of sight along a slight ravine which led down to the Antietam from this position. As Toombs' brigade withdrew around 1:00 p.m. Brown's battery was repositioned to the west (along what is now Branch Road) and Richardson's company displaced to the position Brown previously occupied. By 3:30 p.m. Eshleman and Richardson had withdrawn their companies still further to the high ground west of the Harpers Ferry Road and Brown had displaced his battery to a position near the high ground on which the Zuoave Monument is now located. The Confederate artillery displacement between 10:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. can be seen on the Antietam Battlefield Maps at figures 9 through 12.

Brigadier General Cox's account of the battle as it continued from this point at 3:00 p.m. follows:

"As Rodman's division went forward, he found the enemy before him seemingly detached from Wilcox's opponents, and occupying ridges on his left front, so that he was not able to keep his own connection with Wilcox in the

swinging movement to the right. Still, he made good progress in the face of stubborn resistance, though finding the enemy constantly developing more to his left, and the interval between him and Wilcox widening. The view of the field to the south was now obstructed by fields of tall Indian corn, and under this cover Confederate troops approached the flank in line of battle.

Scammon's officers in the reserve saw them as soon as Rodman's brigades echeloned, as these were toward the front and right. The hostile force proved to be A. P. Hill's division of six brigades, the last of Jackson's force to leave Harper's Ferry, and which had reached Sharpsburg since noon. Those first seen by Scammon's men were dressed in the National blue uniforms which they had captured at Harper's Ferry, and it was assumed that they were part of our own forces till they began to fire. Scammon quickly changed front to the left, drove back the enemy before him, and occupied a line of stone fences, which he held until he was afterward withdrawn from it. Harland's brigade was partly moving in the corn-fields. One of his regiments was new, having been organized only three weeks, and the brigade had somewhat lost its order and connection when the sudden attack came. Rodman directed Colonel Harland to lead the right of the brigade, while he himself attempted to bring the left into position. In performing this duty he fell, mortally wounded. Harland's horse was shot under him, and the brigade broke in confusion after a brief effort of its right wing to hold on.<sup>58</sup>

Colonel Fairchild, commanding the First Brigade of Rodman's division, made this somewhat abbreviated report.

"General Rodman then ordered us to advance to the support of General Sturgis' command. We continued to advance to the opposite hill under a tremendous fire from the enemy's batteries up steep embankments. Arriving near a stone fence, the enemy—a brigade composed of South Carolina and Georgia regiments—opened on us with musketry. After returning their fire, I

immediately ordered a charge, which the whole brigade gallantly repended to, moving with alacrity and steadiness. Arriving at the fence, behind which the enemy were awaiting us, receiving their fire, losing large numbers of our men, we charged over the fence, dislodging them and driving them from their position down the hill toward the village, a stand of regimental colors belonging to a South Carolina regiment being taken by Private Thomas Hare, Company D, Eighty-ninth New York Volunteers, who was afterward killed. We continued to pursue the enemy down the hill. Discovering that they were massing fresh troops on our left, I went back, and requested General Rodman to bring up rapidly the Second Brigade to our support, which he did, they engaging the enemy, he soon afterward falling badly wounded. It was then discovered that the enemy were moving up from the corn-field on our left to flank us, and I ordered the brigade to retire about 250 yards to the rear of the position we now held, which movement was executed in good order and without confusion. The large force advancing on our left flank compelled us to retire from the position, which we could have held had we been properly supported. We remained in this position until we were positively ordered to withdraw from the field, the officers and men regretting such a necessity. Thus ended one of the hardest contested battles of the day."<sup>59</sup>

Fairchild's Account of his brigade's penetration of the Confederate defenses south of Sharpsburg simply does not do their valiant attack ample credit.

The history of the Ninth New York Volunteer Regiment. (Hawkin's Zuoaves) gives a more detailed and personal accounting from its perspective as the lead regiment during the attack to the west-northwest. Lieutenant Colonel Kimball was the regimental commander.

"Lieut.-Colonel Kimball was impatiently walking up and down the line, anxious for the battle to begin, being firmly impressed with the presage that he would never be killed on the field of battle—and he was not.

At length General Rodman came along, and after surveying the position for a moment, sent forward a company from the "Ninth" as skirmishers, and soon after they had engaged those of the enemy, who fell back, the General gave the command of, "First brigade! Forward!"

Eagerly did the men spring to their feet; and the activity with which they obeyed the order indicated the anxiety they had experienced to be delivered from the wearing suspense they were kept in all day. As they reached the top of the hill, they were openly exposed to the full sweep of the rebel batteries in front; and as they pushed on, they left their fallen comrades by the score upon the ground. But no enemy was yet to be seen, and another elevation was before them. Fences and other obstructions were to be surmounted, and many fell in the various attitudes of climbing. When they had approached the second hill, they trampled over several brigades lying under protection of its favorable elevation. It seemed a secure place, none of the rebel batteries being able to reach it with their shell. Would the "Ninth" seek its cover? The thought might have suggested a refuge in such an hour of peril as a secure retreat for—cowards. But it does not seem by their conduct that there was any disposition to avail themselves of the chance. They shouted along the line, as upon a former occasion, urging the inactive troops to rise up and rush upon the enemy, at the same time the action of the Zouaves expressing their intention of taking the lead. Seeing that they did not stir, but cringed lower beneath the rebel fire, the "Ninth" rushed forward.

The regiment hurried on, and soon reached the top of the second hill, where again they were forced to face the tornado of shot and shell, now augmented by a battery the rebels had placed far to the right, cutting the Union troops with a severe enfilading fire. The Zouaves did not blench before this new destruction, but impetuously pressed onward, that they might meet

hand to hand a murderous foe they could not see, and whose fire they could not yet return, and put an end to a contest that presented every disadvantage. Men fell at every step, but still "Forward!" was the shout preceding their war-cry of "Zoo-zoo-zoo!" They passed down the descent that made a slight vale, and soon obtained the slope of the other hill in advance of them, where a halt was ordered to gain a moment's breath for the final requirements of the struggle, which all felt was near at hand. They had advanced a long distance on the double-quick, and this occasion for a moment's respite to concentrate their scattered strength was most opportune and humane. Lieut.-Colonel Kimball ordered the bugler to blow the "assembly of the Ninth," which had lately been adopted; it was done in a blast of three times three, the notes sounding clear and distinct above the din of cannon and bursting shells, and served not only the purpose of guiding those whose strength had not enabled them to keep up with the more hardy veterans, but also gave a shout of defiance to the enemy . . .

Immediately in the rear of Company B was a group of four dead Zouaves, lying one across the other, as though they had stood side by side and fallen simultaneously. One man went quickly to them and carefully turned them aside, to look at their faces and see if life might be extinct—perhaps of a brother. He solemnly shook his head and again hastily returned to his duty. A little nearer, and behind Company II, lay a man wounded in a most frightful manner. The lower portion of his jaw had been carried away, and the torn fragments that remained, together with his tongue, clotted with gore, hung down upon his breast. He sustained himself with one hand while with the other he proudly waved his fez in the air, an action that interpreted the language of his heart—"fallen, but not conquered."

"See that!" exclaimed Lieut.-Colonel Kimball, pointing excitedly with his sword; "isn't that enough to make you fight?"

The men looked at each other, and the tears that then mingled, and which the hot and hissing shell could not stanch, seemed red with sympathetic blood.

The command "Forward!" was again given, and the "Ninth," in line with the whole division, once more advanced, ascending the third elevation, which was but a gentle rise upon the main portion of the heights. Up to this time they had received the fire of artillery only, and had not returned a shot; but as they arrived near the top of the ascent, several brigades of rebel infantry, which were posted behind the stone walls, opened at once a galling storm of bullets upon them. A scene of carnage now ensued too terrible to describe; the imagination, however, may be aided by the statistics, which estimate that from the ranks of the "Ninth" alone there fell, in the space of a few minutes, about two hundred men killed and wounded. The walls in front fairly bristled with the muskets of the enemy. The Zouaves were ordered strictly to retain their fire until they should have approached within whispering distance of the rebels, then to give them a hot fire of "Minie;" afterward to rush upon them with the cold, bright bayonet and finish the work. Therefore, up to this time they had withheld their fire; but when a stalwart rebel raised himself head and shoulders over the wall, opposite Company H, every man who saw the act in the two right companies instantly and simultaneously raised his rifle and sent a bullet at the audacious foe. He was afterward found with about a dozen balls in his head. This started the blaze of musketry along the whole line, for the left, hearing the volleys, supposed the order had been given to "commence firing;" for the din of battle was so great, a command could be heard only by a few. The right wing followed the same action for a similar reason; and the fire of the enemy was now returned to them with such fierceness

that there was scarcely a hole in the wall that was not pierced, and a finger could not be raised above it without fear of amputation. The "Ninth" still advanced, though they had already approached within fifty yards of the rebel brigade, many of which lay stretched out in death since the Zouaves began to fire. Although the regiment was well-nigh exhausted before it reached this spot, yet when they saw the implacable foe almost within their grasp, it sent renewed vigor to their hearts and new strength to their nerves, and on, still on they rushed, maddened at the thought of their fallen comrades. The enemy until this moment had felt comparatively secure behind the wall, but now had some misgivings about their safety, when the men whom they supposed they could easily repulse still came on with renewed determination, and they scattered in flight like so many leaves.

A scene of the wildest confusion took place when the Zouaves surmounted the wall. Some of the enemy begged for mercy on the spot, while others resisted with right good-will, using the bayonet, for few, in such close contact, could get the chance to re-load their pieces. Those who ran away were quickly reached with bullets, and many fell in their cowardly flight; others threw down their arms to save their lives by submission. The Zouaves now had it all their own way, and all along the line startling incidents occurred sufficient to fill a volume.

The colors of the regiment were nobly taken care of. Sergeant Myers, the color-bearer, had been wounded, and fell, but upheld the flag until he was relieved by another, who was soon shot. Another seized the standard and bore it but a little way when he also fell. A very young Zouave next grasped it firmly, and with the most undaunted courage ran out many yards in advance of the line, and thus becoming a single mark, fell with many bullets piercing him. Another and another bore the colors, but both were wounded. Eight men



successively carried it, and each fell, killed or wounded. But it was triumphantly planted upon the spot the enemy had occupied, and who were now upon a hill beyond.

They had been heavily reinforced by troops thrown from their left, and the two forces now did but little more than look at each other. Had the Union troops again assaulted them in their new and strong position, they would undoubtedly have met with a bloody repulse, without the assistance of those idle brigades, which should have been used on the flank; and for this reason the left of the Federal forces fell gently back into a position where their artillery could be effectively used.<sup>60</sup>

One of the more famous personal accounts of the Battle at Antietam was written by Private David Thompson, also a member of the Ninth New York Volunteer Regiment. An excerpt from his narrative is included here.

"We were getting ready now for the charge proper, but were still lying on our faces. Lieutenant-Colonel Kimball was ramping up and down the line. The discreet regiment behind the fence was silent. Now and then a bullet from them cut the air over our heads, but generally they were reserving their fire for that better shot which they knew they would get in a few minutes. The battery, however, whose shots at first went over our heads, had depressed its guns so as to shave the surface of the ground. Its fire was beginning to tell. I remember looking behind and seeing an officer riding diagonally across the field—a most inviting target—instinctively bending his head down over his horse's neck, as though he were riding through driving rain. While my eye was on him I saw, between me and him, a rolled overcoat with its straps on bound into the air and fall among the furrows. One of the enemy's grape-shot had plowed a groove in the skull of a young fellow and had cut his face downward—a dreadful spectacle. A moment after, I heard a man cursing a comrade for lying on him heavily. He was cursing a dying man.

As the range grew better, the firing became more rapid, the situation desperate and exasperating to the last degree. Human nature was on the rack, and there burst forth from it the most vehement, terrible swearing I have ever heard. Certainly the joy of conflict was not ours that day. The suspense was only for a moment, however, for the order to charge came just after. Whether the regiment was thrown into disorder or not, I never knew. I only remember that as we rose and started all the fire that had been held back so long was loosed. In a second the air was full of the hiss of bullets and the hurtle of grape-shot. The mental strain was so great that I saw at that moment the singular effect mentioned, I think, in the life of Goethe on a similar occasion—the whole landscape for an instant turned slightly red. I see again, as I saw it then in a flash, a man just in front of me drop his musket and throw up his hands, stung into vigorous swearing by a bullet behind the ear. Many men fell going up the hill, but it seemed to be all over in a moment, and I found myself passing a hollow where a dozen wounded men lay—among them our sergeant-major, who was calling me to come down. He had caught sight of the blanket rolled across my back, and called me to unroll it and help to carry from the field one of our wounded lieutenants.

When I returned from obeying this summons the regiment (?) was not to be seen. It had gone in on the run, what there was left of it, and had disappeared in the corn-field about the battery. There was nothing to do but lie there and await developments. Nearly all the men in the hollow were wounded, one man—a recruit named Devlin, I think—frightfully so, his arm being cut short off. He lived a few minutes only. All were calling for water, of course, but none was to be had.

We lay there till dusk, perhaps an hour, when the fighting ceased. During that hour, while the bullets snipped the leaves from a young locust

tree growing at the edge of the hollow and powdered us with the fragments, we had time to speculate on many things—among others, on the impatience with which men clamor, in dull times, to be led into a fight. We heard all through the war that the army "was eager to be led against the enemy." It must have been so, for truthful correspondents said so, and editors confirmed it. But when you came to hunt for this particular itch, it was always the next regiment that had it. The truth is, when bullets are whacking against tree-trunks and solid shot are cracking skulls like egg-shells, the consuming passion in the breast of the average man is to get out of the way. Between the physical fear of going forward and the moral fear of turning back, there is a predicament of exceptional awkwardness from which a hidden hole in the ground would be a wonderfully welcome outlet.

Night fell, preventing further struggle. Of 600 men of the regiment who crossed the creek at 3 o'clock that afternoon, 45 were killed and 176 wounded. The Confederates held possession of that part of the field over which we had moved, and just after dusk they sent out detachments to collect arms and bring in prisoners. When they came to our hollow all the unwounded and slightly wounded there were marched to the rear—prisoners of the 15th Georgia. We slept on the ground that night without protection of any kind; for, with a recklessness quite common throughout the war, we had thrown away every incumbrance on going into the fight."<sup>61</sup>

Colonel Fairchild's brigade penetrated the Confederate positions to a greater depth than any other Ninth Corps unit. And, it was Hawkin's Zouaves that achieved the greatest advance. From your current position you can see a granite monument (similar in shape to the Washington Monument in the Nation's capital) to this regiment on the high ground approximately 700 meters to the west.

Following A. P. Hill's successful counterattack against General Rodman's left flank Burnside was forced to withdraw his force to the high ground trace on which you are now standing. As night fell on 17 September, General Scammon's Kanawha Division was deployed north and south along the ridge.

Concurrent with General Rodman's attack on the left, General Wilcox's division was attacking on the Ninth Corps' right flank. To gain a better perspective for their attack we will move now to the next stop.

Colonel Fairchild's brigade penetrated the defenses established forward of the Harpers Ferry Road by both Kemper and Drayton's brigades. At STOP SEVEN, on the other side of the valley we will discuss the Confederate perspective of the battle as associated with Fairchild's attack.

THE ATTACK ON THE NINTH CORPS RIGHT FLANK-STOP SIX (MOVEMENT TIME 10 MINUTES)

From your location at STOP FIVE walk north along the ridgeline until you come to a barbed wire fence, a distance of roughly 100 to 150 meters. Follow the fence to the west until it intersects with a fence running north to south. There is a gate in the north-south fence at the juncture. Proceed through the gate (or, if need be, over it) and continue to follow the east-west fence for approximately another 75 meters whereupon it makes a right angle turn and runs generally due north for 300 meters until you arrive at an old abandoned white farmhouse, once owned by the Otto family. Move to the front yard so you can observe both east and west along the valley leading from Sharpsburg to the Antietam. Directly across the valley (to the north) from the Otto house is the Sherrick house and farm. Both farms existed at the time of the battle. Looking northwest from the Otto house you can see the southern edge of the National Cemetery which on the day of the battle was high ground occupied by several Confederate artillery batteries. A little south of due west and at a distance of 600 meters is the Zouave (Ninth New York Volunteer Regiment) Monument, previously referenced. This is STOP SIX. From here you can see the terrain and general axis of advance followed by Brigadier General Orland B. Wilcox's Union First Division.

The axis of attack for the First Division ran generally from east to west along the valley which extended to the Antietam from Sharpsburg. Movements of the division can be traced on Antietam Battlefied Maps 12 through 14. General Wilcox described his division's disposition, movements and action in the Official Records.

"My orders, received from General Burnside in person, were to cross over after Sturgis should have carried the bridge, and after Cox's and Rodman's divisions should have crossed. My orders then were to take the right of the corps in the attack on Sharpsburg.

After crossing the bridge, the road turns sharply to the right, runs up the stream about 200 yards, then to the left along an open hollow or ravine, which winds along to the village, overlooked by heights to the right and left. Once on the heights, the country is rolling and intersected with field fences, many of which are of stone. The enemy's sharpshooters were posted behind these fences as well as hay-stacks, which also, with orchards and corn-fields, served to conceal their lines. A battery of field guns also commanded the road and hollow down to the river, and the whole plateau above was swept by

cross-fire of artillery. Christ's brigade was filed across the hollow and drawn up along the crest on the right of the road, his left resting near the road, the Seventy-ninth New York (Highlanders), Lieutenant-Colonel Morrison commanding, deployed as skirmishers, and the other three regiments of the brigade in line of battle. These regiments were the Fiftieth Pennsylvania, Major Overton; the Twenty-eighth Massachusetts, Captain Caraher, and Seventeenth Michigan, Colonel Withington.

The Second Brigade, under Colonel Welsh, formed on the heights to the left of the road, deploying the One hundredth Pennsylvania, Lieutenant-Colonel Leckey, as skirmishers, and forming his other three regiments in line of battle, viz: Forty-fifth Pennsylvania, Lieutenant-Colonel Curtin, on the right; Forty-sixth New York, Lieutenant-Colonel Gerhardt, in the center; Eighth Michigan, Captain Ely, on the left. I brought with the division Cook's battery, Eighth Massachusetts, and left Benjamin's battery, Second U. S. Artillery, doing good work in a commanding position across the river in our rear, against the enemy's guns on the plateau and heights in front of us.

My division now formed part of a line which Generals Burnside and Cox were commanding, and all moved forward about—o'clock. We were under fire from the moment a man appeared at the crest of the plateau or crossed the hollow. Taking two pieces of Cook's battery, under Lieutenant Coffin, I moved up the road, while the two brigades gallantly advanced over the plateau toward Sharpsburg.

The rest of Cook's battery was posted on a hill near the bridge. Crook's brigade, of Cox's division, followed in support of my line. Christ's brigade attacked a force of the enemy's infantry along his front, and drove them steadily before him. In following them up, his brigade got in advance of the rest of the line; his supports were not up. While halting, the enemy turned

their battery on him from their right (our left), and for a few moments his troops were exposed to the fire of their battery, a fire of infantry from a corn-field in his front protected by a stone fence, and from a battery farther up in front, beyond the corn-field. The left coming up, soon attracted the attention of the flanking battery. Lieutenant Coffin directed his pieces on the battery beyond the corn-field, and at the same time Christ threw forward the Seventeenth Michigan, with supports, to charge the battery, seeing the guns were withdrawn.

Meantime Welsh conducted his brigade against the enemy in his front and drove them before him with the same success, his right following the crest of the hollow, gradually approaching Christ's left, so that by the time we entered Sharpsburg the quarter part of my division was on the right of the road and extended across the hollow, up the side hill, and on the plateau. On this side hill was an orchard in which a large force of the enemy was posted and firing heavily at both Welsh and Christ.

In finding a position for Coffin's two guns at the head of a lane, which turned up at the first house we passed, I was now able both to see and assist my division at every part of the ground, and Coffin threw solid shot, shell, and canister with great precision and effect into the enemy's ranks. The force in the orchard were dislodged, and fled up the hillside, followed by our fire of both infantry and artillery, and Welsh occupied the orchard.

Our musket ammunition was now exhausted. We had carried the heights of Sharpsburg, and rested partly in the town and partly on the hills. The enemy kept up a desultory fire along our line, but at a respectful distance, so that when Sturgis on the extreme left became heavily pressed, and I was ordered to withdraw to the place where my division formed near the river, every regiment marched back in perfect order. To assist the struggling left, I had already

detached Coffin, with his two guns. He moved across the field to the left and rear, and opened upon the enemy within 300 yards. Here he remained, doing signal execution, until he also exhausted his ammunition and withdrew."<sup>62</sup>

Willcox's First Division was opposed by Pickett's brigade which was commanded by Brigadier General Richard B. Garnett and Jenkin's brigade which was commanded by Colonel Joseph Walker. Initially, as the attack proceeded west paralleling the valley, elements of Jenkin's brigade were deployed in defilade, west of the Confederate artillery vicinity of the National Cemetery; Garnett's brigade was on the eastern (forward) slope of that same high ground.

The infantry deployments were not the major concern, initially, as related by Brigadier General Willcox. It was the effectiveness of the Confederate artillery at the National Cemetery and other batt<sup>ies</sup> south of the valley which slowed movement and increased the casualty figures. Antietam Battlefield Maps numbers 12 and 13 specifically, show the Union and Confederate dispositions and movements during the Ninth Corps resumption of the attack once across the Antietam.

Colonel Thomas Welsh, Commander of the Second Brigade, which comprised the left flank of the First Division's zone of action filed this report.

"The brigade, being held in reserve to the force engaged in storming the bridge, was not brought directly in contact with the enemy until past meridian. Our victorious comrades having meanwhile driven the enemy from the bridge and banks of the creek, I was ordered to cross with my brigade to their relief. Arriving on the opposite side of the stream, and in compliance with verbal instructions from Brigadier-General Willcox, I moved my whole command over a steep hill, immediately charging the enemy and driving them rapidly in the direction of Sharpsburg, my troops advancing to the edge of the town and capturing the rebel Captain Twiggs and several soldiers.

Discovering that we had advanced beyond our supporting forces on our right, and also on our left, I withdrew my command to an orchard directly on the left of Colonel Christ, First Brigade of the division. We remained in this position until ordered back by the general commanding the division to the support of the forces then desperately engaged with the enemy, who were endeavoring to outflank us on our left. My command was exposed for several



hours to a tremendous cross-fire from the artillery of the enemy, as well as a direct fire from their infantry and riflemen in our front, yet they advanced with steadiness and rapidity, driving the enemy at all points and performing strictly the great duty devolved on them by the commanding general."<sup>63</sup>

Colonel S. D. Lee who commanded the Twentieth Reserve Battalion of Artillery which General Lee had repositioned at 3:00 p.m., near the high ground on which the National Cemetery is now located filed this report.

"About 3 p.m., the batteries having refitted and replenished with ammunition, I again moved to the front with twelve guns, all that could be manned, and received orders from one of General Longstreet's aides to take position in front of the village of Sharpsburg, to the right and left of the turnpike, relieving Colonel Walton, of the Washington Artillery, of New Orleans. Four of Moody's guns were placed on the right of the village; two of Parker's and two of Jordan's were placed at the left; Rhett's two pieces were placed on a ridge to the left of the village, on the Sharpsburg and Hagerstown pike. These guns, in their respective positions, did good service. Those in front of the village were exposed to a heavy fire of artillery and infantry, the sharpshooters of the enemy being within 200 yards of them during the entire evening. The guns of Moody's battery, in connection with Squires' battery, of the Washington Artillery . . . repelled some six or eight attempts of the infantry of the enemy to take our position. At one time their infantry was within 150 yards of our batteries, when, by a charge of our supporting infantry, they were driven back. Two guns of Moody's battery, with Garnett's brigade, drove the enemy from the ridge from our troops. The guns retained their position in front of the village till our troops were driven into the village on the right, when, by direction of General Garnett, they withdrew. The enemy were afterward repulsed from the village, and the hill for a short

time was re-occupied by Capt. Thomas [H.] Carter's battery. It was now near dark, and the hill was held but by a few infantry."<sup>64</sup>

The Federal artillery was also active during this phase of the battle in the Ninth Corps' zone of action as indicated in the report of Lieutenant John Coffin, who commanded a section of two guns from Captain Asa Cook's Eighth Federal Battery, Massachusetts Light Artillery.

"In crossing the stone bridge the battery marched left in front, bringing my section in advance. On the enemy's commencing to shell the ravine, I was ordered to take a position about 200 yards in advance of the column; where I was enabled to shell the enemy on our right until they were driven from their position. I was then ordered to advance farther up the road to fire canister. Coming to a turn in the road, I ordered the section to turn to the left and take a position on an elevation about 200 yards to the right of the enemy's guns. I opened on them with canister, discharging both guns to the right, when the enemy disappeared. I then turned my guns to the left against the rebel infantry.

Not deeming the position a good one, I ordered my pieces to be limbered up and take a position on a high eminence overlooking the enemy's infantry, and held this position, my guns telling with terrible effect upon the rebel lines. This position I held until my ammunition was exhausted. I then limbered to the rear and left the field for more ammunition."<sup>65</sup>

Colonel Benjamin C. Christ, who commanded the First Brigade, deployed his brigade north of the valley and formed the extreme right flank of both the division and the Ninth Corps. His account follows.

"About 10 o'clock a.m. I was ordered to support some batteries covering our advance near the stone bridge across Antietam Creek. During the afternoon I crossed the bridge and marched to the right, and parallel with the stream, for several hundred yards. I here deployed the Seventy-ninth New York Volunteers as skirmishers, supported by the Fiftieth Pennsylvania, Twenty-eighth Massachusetts, and Seventeenth Michigan Volunteers, and then moved

forward in front of the enemy's battery (heavily supported by infantry), in the rear of a corn-field, on the right of the road. On reaching the crest of a hill, about 350 yards in front of the battery, I discovered that my support on my left had not come up. Deeming my force alone inadequate for the attack on both artillery and infantry, I was obliged to halt until supported on my left.

While halting under cover from the enemy directly in front, he opened a battery on my left which commanded my whole line from left to right, and for thirty minutes we were under a most severe fire of round shot, shell, grape, and canister, and suffered severely. It was impossible to move forward for the reason before stated—no place in the neighborhood that afforded any cover—and the alternative presented itself either to retire from a good and only position from which to advance on the enemy in front, or to wait patiently until some demonstration on the left would compel him to change the direction of his fire. Again, I could not get under cover without retiring at least 250 yards, in full view of the enemy, and if there would have been the least confusion the men might have retreated in disorder, and exposed a larger and more disordered front to his fire, which would have largely increased the list of casualties. I chose the former and was gratified by having my expectations realized.

A demonstration on the left compelled the enemy to change the direction of his fire, and my supports coming, we moved to the front, where we engaged the enemy on his left, and in about one hour succeeded in driving both his artillery and infantry from the position. I charged on the battery with the Seventeenth Michigan Regiment (this being the regiment immediately in front), supported by the Fiftieth Pennsylvania and Twenty-eighth Massachusetts Volunteers, but when within 100 yards of his guns (and while he was covered by

a hill which prevented my advance column from shooting either his horses or their riders), he limbered up his pieces and retired. I did not deem it prudent to advance after his artillery had retired, for the reason that the woods were lined with his sharpshooters, and I would only have exposed my command to their fire without gaining anything. I retired with my charging party to my line of battle, and maintained my positions until ordered to take another farther down and near the bridge, where the men slept on their arms for the night.<sup>66</sup>

An extract from the official history of the Seventy-Ninth New York Volunteer Regiment provides another view of the battle along the Ninth Corps' right flank.

"... now that the stream was crossed we expected to be sent in on the advance. Filing to the right the Highlanders were formed on the extreme right of the corps, and were soon deployed in a double skirmish line along the bank, and, at the command, moved forward up the hillside till the level ground was reached; we were then in full view of the enemy's lines, on still higher ground about a thousand yards beyond. As soon as the enemy discovered our line, their guns opened with shell; as we advanced and came within short range of their guns the command Forward, double quick! was given, and the line gallantly advanced. It was a terrible ordeal. The fire of eighteen guns was pouring death upon our ranks, cutting the men down at every discharge; we held on through the storm of deadly hail, our open order as skirmishers favoring us more than the troops in our rear, who suffered in a greater degree, till we were halted about three hundred yards from the enemy's guns, and just on the outskirts of the village of Sharpsburg.

Owing to the deadly fire, part of our supporting column was obliged to fall back, but the Second U. S. Regulars succeeded in joining us and together we held the line, while the right wing of the Highlanders advanced still

further, and did some execution among the enemy's gunners. About this time Hawkins' Zouaves made a gallant charge on a battery on our left, carrying it with heavy loss. We maintained our position here till we were out of ammunition, and then the whole line was ordered to fall back to the creek, where we were, in a measure, sheltered from the enemy's fire. By this time the sun had set, the battle was virtually over, and we remained on the skirmish line all night."<sup>67</sup>

Even the most terrible battles are not without their lighter moments, as the diary entry from a soldier fighting in the Seventeenth Michigan Volunteer Regiment, Christ's brigade, shows.

"The Seventeenth has been baptised in blood and christened "Stonewall." The battle of Antietam was fought on Wednesday, September 17th, three days after South Mountain. The Seventeenth did not lose so many in killed—eighteen or twenty, I think, although the list is not yet made out—and eighty or ninety wounded. Company G lost three killed, among whom was Anson Darling. We crossed the Antietam River about 1 p.m., and about three o'clock charged up the heights, which we carried, and advanced to near Sharpsburg. Here, our ammunition giving out, we fell back behind the hill and quietly sat down amid bursting shells and hurtling balls until relieved. As we sat waiting, a spent ball—a six-pounder—struck a tree in front of us. Not having sufficient momentum to penetrate, it dropped back upon the toe of my comrade on my left. With a fierce oath he sprang to his feet and shouted, "Who the h—l? Oh!"<sup>68</sup>

Colonel George Crook, commander of the Kanawha Division's Second Brigade provides little insight in his report as to his brigade's role once west of the Antietam. In fact, it is unclear from either Brigadier General Cox's or Brigadier General Willcox's reports as to the specific relationship and mission of Crook's brigade in regard to the First Division. It is clear that Crook's brigade had been detached from its parent unit since its abortive attempt to seize the bridge earlier that morning. And, it is also clear that Crook's brigade participated in the attack on the Confederate positions within the First Division's zone of action. In fact, Colonel Crook's account of the battle was so inconsequential that it involved only a single line in the official records.

"The brigade also participated in the charge on the enemy."<sup>69</sup>

A somewhat more detailed account of the brigade's action was provided in the report rendered by one of Crook's regimental commanders, Major Wyman J. Jackson. Major Jackson commanded the Eleventh Ohio Infantry Volunteer Regiment.

"We charged across the open fields west of the creek, where we were halted close to a stone fence. The movement was made in conjunction with troops on our right and left. Those on our left, being unexpectedly attacked in flank by a superior force, were compelled to fall back. Under some indications that the enemy were about to follow up the charge on our flank, I wheeled the regiment left and backward, the right standing fast on the line of battle, so as to oppose a front to any such flank movement. Shortly after, our left was re-enforced by one regiment, and I resumed the first position, to follow up the charge. The re-enforcement was insufficient, was in a situation exposed to a terrible fire of infantry and artillery, and, after a fearful loss of life, fell back. I then resumed a position fronting the left, at right angles to and resting on our line. Shortly after, our whole line fell back, and I followed in rear of the Thirty-sixth to the eastern slope of the hill west of the bridge."<sup>70</sup>

A good summary of the Union actions on the Ninth Corps' right flank was provided by Brigadier General Cox.

"The battle was a fierce one from the moment Willcox's men showed themselves on the open ground. Christ's brigade, taking advantage of all the cover the trees and inequalities of surface gave them, pushed on along the depression in which the road ran, a section of artillery keeping pace with them in the road. The direction of movement brought all the brigades of the first line in echelon, but Welsh soon fought his way up beside Christ, and they together drove the enemy successively from the fields and farm-yards till they reached the edge of the village. Upon the elevation on the right of the

road was an orchard in which the shattered and diminished force of Jones made a final stand, but Willcox concentrated his artillery fire upon it, and his infantry was able to push forward and occupy it. They now partly occupied the town of Sharpsburg, and held the high ground commanding it on the southeast, where the National Cemetery now is. The struggle had been long and bloody. It was half-past four in the afternoon, and ammunition had again run low, for the wagons had not been able to accompany the movement. Willcox paused for his men to take breath again and to fetch up some cartridges. . . .

. . . Being at the centre when this break occurred on the left, I saw that it would be impossible to continue the movement to the right, and sent instant orders to Willcox and Crock to retire and the left of their line, and to Sturgis to come forward into the gap made in Rodman's. The troops on the right swung back in perfect order; Scammon's brigade hung on at its stone wall at the extreme left with unflinching tenacity till Sturgis had formed on the curving hill in rear of them, and Rodman's had found refuge behind. Willcox's left then united with Sturgis, and Scammon was withdrawn to a new position on the left flank of the whole line."<sup>71</sup>

On the Confederate side, the bulk of the lead elements of Willcox's First Division encountered Pickett's brigade which earlier had been positioned to protect batteries from both S. D. Lee's and the Washington Artillery battalions that were firing from the high ground vicinity the National Cemetery. Pickett's brigade was commanded by Brigadier General Richard B. Garnett. His report of the battle is included here; troop dispositions throughout the afternoon can be seen on Antietam Battlefield Maps numbers 11 through 14.

"Early in the forenoon of September 17 [the brigade] composed of the Eighth, Eighteenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-eighth, and Fifty-sixth Virginia Volunteers, commanded by Colonel Hunton, Major Cabell, Lieut. William N. Wood, Captain Wingfield, and Captain McPhail, were ordered to the southeastern side of the village to support several batteries of Washington Artillery, commanding the easterly and southerly approaches to the town. As far as practicable

the command was sheltered in a hollow in the rear of the artillery. For some four or five hours it was subjected to an almost uninterrupted fire of solid shot, shell, and spherical case, by which a number of men were killed and wounded, which casualties were borne by the troops with remarkable firmness and steadiness. I was subsequently ordered forward on the brow of the hill to dislodge the enemy's skirmishers, who began to annoy our artillery to the eastward. Here we were more exposed to the Federal artillery than in our former position, and suffered considerably. At length, for some cause unknown to me, a large portion of the pieces were withdrawn, and I moved my command farther back to a more secure place. Having been here a short time, I was informed that a portion of Col. Stephen D. Lee's battalion had taken the place of the Washington Artillery, and wished some skirmishers to protect his pieces from the sharpshooters of the enemy. I sent forward the Fifty-sixth Regiment, under the command of Captain McPhail, for this purpose. Not long after, I learned that the enemy had crossed the Antietam (a stream in our front) in very large force, and was moving toward the point occupied by the artillery. I again moved forward my force and took up a position in front of two pieces of Colonel Lee's battalion, in a corn-field, with space enough between the wings for them to be used with effect. The Fifty-sixth Regiment, which was in front, was recalled, and rejoined the left wing of the main body. Soon a large number of the enemy's skirmishers were seen to our left, as if to flank us. There were none of our forces in sight in that direction. A brisk fire from the left checked and finally caused them to retire. Now a large force made its appearance, marching to the front, having debouched from the woods on the banks of the Antietam, which had partially concealed them. At the same time heavy bodies were observed moving to attack our troops on the right, composed of Drayton's and a portion of Kemper's brigades. I moved my command



some distance to the front in the standing corn (as many of my guns were short range), in order that they could produce more effect, and opened fire. At this time, I do not think my effective force could have exceeded 200 men, yet these, with two rifled pieces, most gallantly and skillfully served, under the command of Captain Moody, and superintended by Colonel Lee, checked and held at bay a force of the enemy many times our number. When this unequal contest had lasted over an hour, I discovered that the Federals had turned our extreme right, which began to give way, and a number of the Yankee flags appeared on the hill in rear of the town and not far from our only avenue of escape. I ordered the brigade to fall back, deeming it in imminent danger of being surrounded and captured, as it would have been impossible for it to have held its position without the support of the impossible for it to have held its position without the support of the troops on the right. There being some delay in withdrawing Moody's section of artillery, I take pleasure in saying I saw Major Cabell halt and face his men about, to await its removal, as mentioned in his official report.

The main street of the town was commanded by the Federal artillery. My troops, therefore, passed, for the most part, to the north of the town along the cross-streets. In this direction I found troops scattered in squads from various parts of the army, so that it was impossible to distinguish men of the different commands. Having reached the rear of the town, and learning that General Toombs had re-enforced our right just after it was driven back, and restored the fortunes of the day in that quarter, I gathered as many men as I could get to follow me from among the dispersed force (which did not amount to a large number, as many said they were looking for proper commands), and accompanied by Capt. William N. Berkeley, of the Eighth Virginia Regiment, and Lieutenants McIntire and Sorrel, of my staff, I joined General Drayton's

command south of the village. I found, on my arrival, that the enemy had been successfully repulsed, only a few skirmishers remaining in sight, which were being driven back by our troops of the same description.<sup>16</sup>

The report of Major George C. Cabell, commander of the Eighteenth Virginia Regiment amplifies the action previously described by Brigadier General Garnett.

"Early on the morning of September 17, the Eighteenth Virginia Regiment, about 75 strong, under my command, was marched by the left flank into a position in rear of two batteries of the Washington Artillery, posted on a hill to the south and east of Sharpsburg, Md. The enemy were pouring a heavy fire of round and canister shot upon the hill when the brigade commanded by General Garnett was put in position, which was continued furiously during the day until about 3 p.m. Our position was changed two or three times during the morning, as circumstances required, moving alternately to the left and right, to shelter the men from a dreadful fire, to which it was impossible to reply with small-arms. The Eighteenth Regiment lost by this artillery fire along 10 killed and wounded.

About 3 p.m. the enemy crossed the creek in heavy force and advanced upon us. My regiment, with the remainder of the brigade, was ordered to the summit of the hill, and fire was at once opened upon the enemy's skirmishers, who were soon driven back to their advancing line of battle, composed of two or three regiments, immediately in our front. The enemy came up rapidly, and we advanced a short distance to meet them. They, soon after receiving our first fire, fell back some little distance, and took shelter behind a rail fence, and opened furious fire upon us. The fighting now became general along the line of the brigade, we gaining rather than losing ground, when the enemy was re-enforced by two or three regiments. These last regiments came up upon the left of the regiments already engaged with us, and extended their line

perpendicularly to the rear, and opened a severe oblique fire, which was directed principally upon the Eighteenth and Eighth Virginia Regiments. We were compelled to change the front of several of our companies at this juncture, our fire never slackening. The enemy, though outnumbering us at least five to one, were held completely in check, and did not advance a pace. About this time the brigades of Generals Kemper and Drayton fell back, and a large force opposed to them swung round toward Sharpsburg and were already getting in our rear, when General Garnett, from sheer necessity, ordered his brigade to retire. We had moved back some 50 yards when it was discovered that a battery ([A. S.] Cutts', I think) would be endangered by our falling back. I halted my little regiment, faced it about, and waited until the battery limbered up and moved off. The regiment was then drawn off with the remainder of the brigade."<sup>73</sup>

Another regimental commander in Garnett's brigade provided a somewhat lighthearted account of his brigade's part in the battle. Although he apparently, for reasons not explained in the report, did not participate himself.

"The Nineteenth Regiment, weakened by straggling and the casualties of the 14th, was stationed on an eminent hill on the east side of Sharpsburg, with only 50 men, commanded by Lieut. William N. Wood, acting adjutant, where they were attacked in the evening of the 17th by a large force of the enemy approaching in three directions. Under these circumstances the regiment maintained its position for two hours, when the enemy had gotten in our rear from the right, and had also passed beyond us on the left, and was pressing with vigor with ten times our number immediately in front of us. Still, death was dealt by the unerring shots of this noble little band. The enemy, with his large force, had come within 80 steps of us, when a hasty retreat down the hill with a circuitous route to the left saved us from the prisoner's cell."<sup>74</sup>

It was Jenkins' brigade which deployed forward from Sharpsburg and successfully held its position which centered on the Old Stone Mill. If you look up the valley toward Sharpsburg you see a rebuilt replica of the Old Stone Mill at a distance of 300 to 350 meters. From Colonel Walker's report that follows you can visualize the action against the Union First Division as seen by the Confederate forces.

"By order of General Jones, it [the brigade] moved late in the evening across a ravine to the right, with Kemper's, Garnett's, and Drayton's brigades, where it remained under a heavy fire of shot and shell until 3 o'clock in the evening of the 17th, when it moved back, by order of General Jones, and occupied its first position in support of [G. V.] Moody's battery and a company of the Washington Artillery (Captain [C. W.] Squires'), both from Louisiana. Here the brigade endured a terrific fire of shot and shell for some half hour, when, the ammunition of the artillery having been exhausted, it advanced some 400 yards to an apple orchard, under a heavy fire of artillery and small arms. Perceiving the enemy in force in several positions, from any of which we were assailable, I threw out the First, Fifth, and Sixth Regiments South Carolina Volunteers to oppose him on the left, and the Palmetto Sharpshooters and the Second Regiment Rifles South Carolina Volunteers to meet him in the center and on the right. From this position we continued to pour a destructive fire into the ranks of the enemy, at short range, until he recoiled and retreated out of sight among the timber on Antietam Creek.

At this juncture, perceiving that the enemy had advanced three heavy columns some 400 yards in rear of the brigade and to the right across a ravine leading up from the creek, and was steadily driving back the brigades of Generals Kemper and Drayton, I moved this brigade into line parallel with the turnpike and ravine and near to the latter, and opened a destructive enfilade fire upon the enemy, which assisted materially in driving back his columns. Changing the front of the brigade again toward Antietam Creek, and at right

angles to the turnpike and ravine, I threw forward a line of skirmishers to a fence near to the timber on the creek, and bivouacked for the night.<sup>75</sup>

Somehow the reports filed by commanders from both sides often seem self-serving, if not stilted. The following lengthy account of the battle by Private Frank M. Nixon in Jenkins' brigade provides a welcome respite from the official accounts which have been included previously.

"On reaching Sharpsburg we were stopped in an apple orchard (our regiment) and we fared well. We remained in this orchard that night, all next day and night. The second morning about sunrise the Yankees opened their artillery from the heights on us, and it seemed as if they had placed all the cannon in the world up there; it was certainly the heaviest and most terrific artillery firing during the entire war, and has gone down in history as such. Fortunately for us we were in a bottom and the worst of the shells went over us, but not all. We had a good many hurt while in this position. Our batteries were on the hill above us and were replying all they could. About 8 o'clock we were ordered up the hill to protect our batteries; the enemy were charging them. We went up the hill at a double quick. Our regiment was on the left of the brigade and we were going left in front, which put us to the front. I was trotting by the side of Maj. Livingston amid a furor of bursting shells. About half way up the hill Maj. Livingston called to me, saying, Lead on, Frank, I am wounded. I called to Capt. Knotts, who was the senior captain present, and told him to take command of the regiment. We got in position on the hill in rear of a plank fence and were told not to fire a shot till ordered to do so. While lying behind the fence the Yankees were making their charge and coming down the opposite hill in as pretty a line as on dress parade. In front of us, and about midway, there was a stone fence in another apple orchard. The Yankees were making for this fence, and, as I said before, were moving on it at a double quick and a regular dress parade line. The old captain commanding our batteries had shot himself out of balls, and, all his

horses being killed, he ordered his men to cut off the trace chains. With these he loaded his pieces and fired. It seemed that as the chains reached the ranks they spread themselves out full length and cut their way broadside through. The old captain jumped up, yelled, and ordered another load, with about the same result. This was done several times, and finally the column began to waver and weaken. At this point a Yankee colonel rode to the front with drawn sword and rallied his men, who were about to give way. Just then I said to Kite Folk, from Bamberg, a boy like myself, but a year or two older, Let us shoot him. I picked up a gun lying near me and Kite and I put our guns through the fence and fired together. The colonel fell and was carried from the field. The enemy fell back, but very soon came again. Forty-two years after this occurrence I was running the Hotel Aiken. I was telling of this incident one evening when a guest of the house, who had registered as ———Johnson, said he knew the circumstance perfectly—that he was the major of that regiment and when the colonel was killed, as stated, he took command and received his promotion as lieutenant-colonel; that it was he who led them back in the second charge. When the enemy made this second charge we, too, made a charge, and the stone fence, spoken of before, being about equal distance from each of us, it was a race, who and who. We won the race, and when we fell in behind the fence the Yankees were not more than fifteen steps away; but it was not long before they had moved off, leaving a good crowd behind lying on the field. Could one have been so situated on one of these hills with nothing to do but witness the two forces making for that fence, the Yankees coming down the hill on their side, moving in line as if on drill, determination on their faces and a quick, steady step without a falter or a quaver—on the other hill a lot of dirty, hungry, footsore, naked and barefoot men lying behind that plank fence awaiting orders. Soon the order came, and

we were told to get to that stone fence. No line for us. Darling Patterson, of Barnwell, was our color bearer, and he led off with our flag waving overhead. The men followed, each one doing all he could to get there first. We beat them to it, and when Patterson struck his flag staff into the ground we had the fence, and too well did they know it. We tore loose into them, they not being more than fifteen steps distant. They could not stand it—they broke in confusion and retired in about the same order that we had advanced; but they were soon rallied and we had it hot for some time. The fence, however, was a great protection to us.

We were well protected by our stone fence in the apple orchard, but the enemy kept us pretty well engaged in our front, and we had no time to look around and see how other parts of our line were doing. We had been fighting behind this fence for perhaps two or three hours when I was surprised on looking around to see a long Georgia captain running from where we had come in the morning, and coming directly to me. I was then standing up under an apple tree eating an apple. On reaching me he said, Where is your gun, and why are you not shooting? I replied, I am the colonel's orderly, He then asked for the colonel. I told him that the regiment was right then without any one to command it. He told me to get them back—the entire line had fallen back to our previous position—that we were the only ones so advanced, and to look to the right, coming from the direction of the barn, and I would see we were about already surrounded. I yelled out, "First South Carolina, retreat," and I led off. The enemy were so close in our rear when we left the fence that we had to run around the head of their column; but every man succeeded in passing around them. But then we had a long, sloping hill to go up—nothing to break the view—an open field. Away we went, and while I was doing all I knew how in the way of running, and when I had about covered half the distance back, I

ran up on Talt Best, from Allendale, lying flat on his back, shot through the thigh. He had lain there for several hours, being shot down when we advanced. Talt was holding out his arms and asked me piteously, Frank, don't leave me here to die. It looked like death to me to stop, but I could not resist the appeal. I stooped down, raised him up. Just then Sid Key, from Joyce's Branch, ran up and I asked Sid to help me get Talt off. We got him back to our former line, where we turned him over to the litter bearers, and we got to our positions. We had not been there over five minutes when Sid Key was shot. We received orders to prepare to advance, and I recollect Lieut. Jack Stansell, of Company E, waving his sword, cried out, Forward, Company E. After repeating this several times and getting no response he discovered that he had but one man left in Company E, Arthur Thompson, of Elko. He then cried, Forward, Thompson, go it, Thompson. Almost simultaneously a minnie ball passed through Thompson's body and a piece of shell hit Lieut. Stansell on the side of the knee. Both were carried off, and they were the last men of Company E.

After getting quieted down enough to look around I commenced to see who we could get to take command of the regiment. I have already told you that Capt. Knotts was placed in command when Maj. Livingston told me he was wounded. I could not find Capt. Knotts, nor had seen him the whole time of our advance while we were holding the stone fence. I think I may have failed to say heretofore that Jim Hagood had been appointed sergeant-major to fill the place of Mortimer Glover, of Orangeburg. In looking around for a regimental commander I discovered that there was only one commissioned officer left in the regiment. This officer was Lieut. Sweat, of Bamberg. I told him he would have to command the regiment, being the only officer. He refused to do so, and, after some thought, he told me to go to Sergt.-Major Jim Hagood



and tell him to assume command. This I did, and Jim Hagood, a non-commissioned officer and an eighteen-year-old boy took the command.\*76

Having gained the Confederate perspective of events on D. R. Jones' divisional left flank you need to move next to the center of Longstreet's defensive sector.

### FAIRCHILD'S AXIS OF ADVANCE-STOP SEVEN

From your current location at STOP SIX--the Otto farmhouse--move north down to the first asphalt road to your front. Turn west and walk toward Sharpsburg until you arrive at Branch Road (about 150 meters from the Otto house). Turn south onto Branch Road and walk approximately 500 meters until you arrive at the second hilltop. You will notice a monument to the 28th Ohio Infantry at this location. This is STOP SEVEN.

To the west-northwest from here is the Zouave Monument at a distance of approximately 400 meters. Almost due north and at a distance of 1000 meters is the high ground on which is now sited the Antietam National Cemetery. Looking due east is STOP FIVE at a distance of 350 meters. Remember STOP FIVE is where the batteries of Clark and Durell were positioned sometime around 3:00 p.m. to support the attack in the Ninth Corps' center. Due south of your position at a distance of approximately 400 meters (and east of Branch Road which was then only a dirt farm road) was Brigadier General Toombs' brigade which had established a position running north and south in a cornfield.

It was along the axis extending from STOP FIVE through your current position at STOP SEVEN that Fairchild's brigade, which was composed of volunteer New York regiments, attacked. The attack terminated on the high ground on which the Zouave Monument is now located. This was to ultimately represent the deepest Union penetration in the Ninth Corps' sector on 17 September. Opposing Fairchild's brigade were two understrength Confederate brigades commanded by Brigadier Generals Drayton and Kemper. The infantry of these brigades were positioned initially on the reverse (western) slope of the high ground on which the Zouave monument now stands. Forward of the infantry was Brown's artillery battery. In fact as Fairchild's brigade moved forward it was opposed only by Confederate artillery--artillery as represented by Brown's battery or the several batteries of Washington and later S. D. Lee's artillery at the National Cemetery or other batteries west of the Harpers Ferry Road. It was not until Jenkins' and Garnett's brigades had been flanked did Fairchild's Union brigade come into direct contact with Confederate infantry in the form of Drayton and Kemper's brigades.

Colonel Montgomery D. Corse, commander of the Seventeenth Virginia Infantry, Kemper's brigade submitted this report.

"About 4 p.m. the enemy was reported to be advancing. We moved forward with the First and Eleventh Regiments (the Seventh and Twenty-fourth being detached to operate on some other part of the field) of the brigade to the top of the hill to a fence, and immediately engaged the enemy at a distance of 50 or 60 yards, at the same time under fire from their batteries on the hills beyond. My regiment, being the extreme right on the line there engaging the enemy, came, directly opposite the colors of the regiment to which it was

opposed, consequently being overlapped by them, as far as I could judge, at least 100 yards. Regardless of the great odds against them, the men courageously stood their ground until, overwhelmed by superior numbers, they were forced to retire.

I have to state here, general, that we put into the fight but 46 enlisted men and 9 officers. Out of this number, 7 officers and 24 men were killed and wounded and 10 taken prisoners.

I received a wound in the foot, which prevented me from retiring with our line, and was left in the hands of the enemy for a short time, but was soon rescued by General Toombs' brigade and a portion of yours, which drove the enemy back beyond the line we had occupied in the morning.<sup>77</sup>

The most detailed and humorous account of the action in the sector defended by Kemper's brigade was recorded by Alexander Hunter, Seventeenth Virginia Regiment, in his "High Privates Sketch of Sharpsburg," extracts from which are included below.

"Our brigade was a mere outline of its former strength, not a sixth remaining. Our regiment, the Seventeenth, that once carried into battle eight hundred muskets, now stood on the crest, ready to die in a forlorn hope, with but forty-six muskets. My company, that often used to march in a grand review in two platoons of fifty men each, carried into Sharpsburg but two muskets (the writer and one other), commanded by Lieutenant Perry. Is it a wonder that we deliberately made up our minds to die on that hill, knowing what a force must be sent against us?

All at once, an eight gun battery, detecting our position, tried to shell us out, preparatory to their infantry advance, and the air around was filled by the bursting iron. Our battery of four guns took its place about twenty steps on our right, for our right flank was entirely undefended. They replied to the enemy. During the fire a shell burst not ten feet above where the Seventeenth lay, prone on their faces, and literally tore poor Appich, of

Company E, to pieces, shattering his body terribly, and causing the blood to spatter over many who lay around him. A quiver of the form, and then it remained still. Another Hotchkiss came screeching where we lay, and exploded, two more men were borne to the rear; still the line never moved nor uttered a sound. The shells split all around, and knocked up the dust until it sprinkled us so, that if it intended to keep the thing up, it threatened to bury the command alive.

Oh, those long minutes that we lay with closed eyes, expecting mutilation, and a shock of the plunging iron, with every breath we drew—would it never end? But it kept up for fully fifteen minutes, and the men clenched their jaws tight and never moved; a line of corpses could not have been more stirless.

At last! at last! the firing totally ceases, then the battery with us limbered up and moved away, because, as they said, their ammunition was exhausted; but murmurs and curses loud and deep were heard from the brigade, who openly charged the battery with deserting them in the coming ordeal. It was in truth a desertion, for instead of throwing their shells at the enemy's eight gun battery, thereby drawing their dreadful fire upon us, they should have laid low and waited until the infantry attack was made, then every shot would have told, every shell or solid shot a help—but they moved away and left us.

An ominous silence followed premonitory of the deluge. The Seventeenth lay with the rest of the brigade, recumbent on the earth, behind the fence, with their rifles resting on the lower rails. The men's faces are pale, their features set, their hearts throbbing, their muscles strung like steel.

The officers cry in low tones, steady men! steady, they are coming.  
Ready!!

The warning click of the hammers raised as the guns are cocked, run down the lines, a monetary solemn sound—for when you hear that, you know that the supreme moment has come.

The hill in our front shut out all view, but the advancing enemy were close on us, they were coming up the hill, the loud tones of their officers, the clanking of their equipments, and the steady tramp of the approaching host was easily distinguishable.

Then our Colonel said in a quiet calm tone, that was heard by all, Steady lads, steady! Seventeenth, don't fire until they get above the hill.

Each man sighted his rifle about two feet above the crest, and then, with his finger on the trigger, waited until an advancing form came between the bead and the clear sky behind.

The first thing we saw appear was the gilt eagle that surmounted the pole, then the top of the flag, next the flutter of the Stars and Stripes itself slowly mounting—up it rose; then their hats came in sight; still rising, the faces emerged; next a range of curious eyes appeared, then such a hurrah as only the Yankee troops could give broke the stillness, and they surged towards us.

Keep cool, men—don't fire yet, shouted Colonel Corse; and such was their perfect discipline that not a gun replied. But when the bayonets flashed above the hill-top the forty-six muskets exploded at once, and sent a leaden shower full in the breasts of the attacking force, not over sixty yards distant. It staggered them—it was a murderous fire—and many fell; some of them struck for the rear, but the majority sent a stunning volley at us, and but for that fence there would have been hardly a man left alive. The rails, the posts, were shattered by the balls; but still it was a deadly one—fully one-half of the Seventeenth lay in their tracks; the balance that is left load

and fire again and again, and for about ten minutes the unequal struggle is kept up. The attacking force against the First brigade, as I learned, was a full brigade, three thousand strong, and against our little remnant is a full regiment. What hope is there? None. And yet for the space of a few rounds the combat is kept up, the combatants not over thirty yards apart. We stood up against this force more from a blind dogged obstinacy than anything else, and gave back fire for fire, shot for shot, and death for death. But it was a pin's point against Pelides' spear. Our Colonel falls wounded; every officer except five of the Seventeenth is shot down; of the forty-six muskets thirty-five are dead, dying or struck down; three, myself among them, are run over by the line in blue, and throw up our hands in token of surrender.

Two of them stopped to take our small squad in charge, and the rest of their line hurried forward towards the village. As we turned to leave we saw our whole brigade striking for the rear at a 2:40 gait. The South Carolina brigade on our left had given away, and the enemy swept on triumphantly, with nothing to bar his progress and save the village, the coveted prize, from falling into their hands; but Toombs' Georgia brigade, which had been driven from the Antietam bridge early in the forenoon, had reformed in our rear, and covered the hamlet.

When a farewell glance of the ground was taken there was a sad sight; there rested the line of the Seventeenth just as they had fallen.

The three prisoners were hurried to the rear, and on reaching the opposite crest found that our fire had been very destructive; each man had probably killed or wounded his man. On the ground surrounded by a group of officers and a surgeon was the Colonel of the regiment that had charged the Seventeenth. He appeared to be mortally hurt, and was deathly pale. Hurrying us back a few hundred yards on the top of a hill, out of the reach of shot and

shell, captured and capturers turned to look at the scene before them. As far as our eye could reach our forces seemed to be giving ground: a dashed line after line of the Yankee reserves pushed forward it looked dark for the Rebels—it seemed to us as if Sharpsburg was to be our Waterloo.

A frightful struggle was now going on in the woods half a mile or so to our left. It appeared to us as if all the demons of hell had been unloosed—all the dogs of war unleashed to prey upon and rend each other; long volleys of musketry vomited their furious discharges of pesilential lead; the atmosphere was crowded by the exploding shells; baleful fires gleamed through the foliage, as if myriads of fireflies were flitting through the boughs, and there was a fringe of vivid, sparkling flame spurting out along the skirt of the forest, while the concussion of the cannon seemed to make the hills tremble and totter.

But a change takes place in this panorama; a marvellous change, before our very eyes. One moment the lines of blue are steadily advancing everywhere and sweeping everything before them; another moment and all is altered. The disordered ranks of blue come rushing back in disorder, while the Rebels followed fast, and then bullet hitting around us caused guards and prisoners to decamp.

What was the import of this?

None could tell, but still the reflux tide bore us back with it. At last a prisoner, a wounded Rebel officer, was being supported back to the rear, and we asked him, and the reply came back: "Stonewall Jackson has just gotten back from Harper's Ferry, those troops fighting the Yankees now are A. P. Hill's division."

Well, we felt all right, if Old Stonewall was up, none need care about the result.<sup>78</sup>

Both Kemper and Drayton's brigades were driven from their positions by Fairchild's Union brigade. The Confederate forces then withdrew to the high ground vicinity the Harpers Ferry Road and established new defensive lines. By this time the lead elements of A. P. Hill's division were arriving from Harpers Ferry and moving rapidly into position on the Confederate right flank. Brigadier General Toombs' brigade which had occupied new defensive positions in the cornfield 400 meters south of your present position saw what Fairchild's New York Volunteers and the Zouaves were doing to Drayton and Kemper's force on his left. What occurred next is recorded in Toombs' official report to Brigadier General D. R. Jones. The action can be followed on Antietam Battle-field Maps 12 through 14.

"I then received your order that, as soon as General Gregg (of General A. P. Hill's division) arrived and relieved me, to move my command and take position immediately on your right, on the heights then occupied by the rest of your command. Before I was relieved by General Gregg, I received from you another order to move up my command immediately to meet the enemy, who had already commenced his attack on your position. I immediately put my command in motion, then consisting of the Fifteenth and Seventeenth Georgia (lessened by one company from each, sent out as skirmishers), Major Little's battalion, of the Eleventh, a small number of Kearse's regiment, and on the way I found Colonel Cumming and a part of the Twentieth, who had returned from supplying themselves with ammunition and joined me, and hastened with all speed to your position. On my arrival, I found the enemy in possession of the ground I was ordered by you to occupy on your right. He had driven off our troops, captured McIntosh's battery (attached to General Drayton's brigade), and held possession of all the ground from the corn-field on your right down to the Antietam Bridge road, including the eastern suburbs of the town of Sharpsburg, all the troops defending it having been driven back and retired to the rear or through the town.

Under this state of facts, I had instantly to determine either to retreat or fight. A retreat would have left the town of Sharpsburg and General Longstreet's rear open to the enemy, and was inadmissible. I, therefore, with



less than one-fifth of the enemy's numbers, determined to give him battle, and immediately and rapidly formed my line of battle in the road within 100 paces of the enemy's lines. While forming in the road. Captain Troup, my aide, on my extreme left rallied a portion of General Kemper's brigade, who were retiring from the field, attached it to my line of battle, and led them into action with conspicuous gallantry and skill.

As soon as possible, I opened fire upon the enemy's columns who immediately advanced in good order upon me until he approached within 60 or 80 paces, when the effectiveness of the fire threw his column in considerable disorder, upon perceiving which I immediately ordered a charge, which, being brilliantly and energetically executed by my whole line, the enemy broke in confusion and fled. McIntosh's battery was recaptured and our position retaken within less than thirty minutes after the commencement of this attack upon him. The enemy fled in confusion toward the river and bridge, making two or three efforts to rally which were soon defeated by the vigorous charges of our troops, aided by Captain Richardson's battery, which I ordered up immediately upon the recovery of the heights, and which, with its accustomed promptness and courage, was rapidly placed in position and action. The enemy, to cover his retreating columns, brought over the bridge a battery and placed it in position. I ordered Richardson's battery to open upon it, and at the same time ordered the Fifteenth and Twentieth Georgia forward, who pursued the enemy so close to his guns as to bring them within range of musketry, which compelled his battery, after a few shots, to join his fleeing infantry and retreat across the bridge. I desired to pursue the enemy across the river, but being deficient in artillery to meet his heavy batteries on the other side, I sent my aide, Captain Troup, to General Lee for the purpose of supplying myself, who ordered Captain Squires to report to me immediately, which

he was unable to do, from not receiving the order in time, until nearly night, when it was too late to risk the movement, and therefore, I ordered him to hold himself in readiness for the movement in the morning, if the action should be renewed. I then determined to move my troops upon and occupy the position held by me on the river at the beginning of the action but before the execution of this purpose I received your order to change my position and to occupy the heights on the opposite side of the road leading to the bridge from Sharpsburg, on the left of your command, which order was immediately executed and the troops bivouacked for the night.<sup>79</sup>

Toombs' counterattack which was mounted against Fairchild's New Yorkers was obviously aided by the coordinated and larger counterattack which was being initiated by the lead elements of A. P. Hill's division. To gain a better view of the terrain over which Hill's counterattack was mounted you will need to move to the next STOP.

A. P. HILL'S COUNTERATTACK AGAINST THE NINTH CORPS' LEFT FLANK  
STOP EIGHT (MOVEMENT TIME 5 MINUTES)

From your present location at STOP SEVEN proceed south along Branch Road for approximately 400 meters until you arrive at the next hilltop. At this position you will see a monument to the 12th Ohio Infantry. This is STOP EIGHT.

From here you can look due east across the valley to your front and see STOP FOUR at approximately 400 meters. Initially, Toombs' brigade was positioned only 100 to 150 meters to your front, on line with and paralleling the valley. The field, also to your front, extended in width 300 meters to the north and south and in length to the valley below. It was cultivated in full grown corn on September 17. Consequently, Hill's deploying rebel brigades were not observable to Union forces. As you know from the discussion at STOP FOUR, Harland's brigade of Rodman's division attacked through this cornfield. Toombs had already displaced before encountering Harland's forces, but Harland's brigade was not so fortunate in avoiding the battle tested brigades of A. P. Hill's division.

Antietam Battlefield Maps 12 through 14 depict the disposition of Hill's forces as they advanced via the Saw Mill Road from Boteler's Ford and formed to counterattack the Ninth Corps' left flank. A. P. Hill's report gives a good overview of the engagement.

"By direction of General Jackson, I remained at Harper's Ferry until the morning of the 17th, when, at 6:30 a.m., I received an order from General Lee to move to Sharpsburg. Leaving Thomas, with his brigade, to complete the removal of the captured property, my division was put in motion at 7:30 a.m. The head of my column arrived upon the battle-field of Sharpsburg, a distance of 17 miles, at 2:30 o'clock, and reporting in person to General Lee, he directed me to take position on our right. Brig. Gen. D. R. Jones, commanding on our right, gave me such information as my ignorance of the ground made necessary. My troops were rapidly thrown into position, Pender and Brockenbrough on the extreme right, looking to a road which crossed the Antietam near its mouth, Branch, Gregg, and Archer extending to the left and connecting with D. R. Jones' division. [D. G. ] McIntosh's battery had been

sent forward to strengthen Jones' right, weakened by troops withdrawn to our left and center. Braxton's battery, commanded by Lieutenant [E. A.] Marye (Captain Braxton acting as chief of artillery), was placed upon a commanding point on Gregg's right; Crenshaw and Pegram on a hill to my left, which gave them a wide field of fire. My troops were not in a moment too soon. The enemy had already advanced in three lines, had broken through Jones' division, captured McIntosh's battery, and were in the full tide of success. With a yell of defiance, Archer charged them, retook McIntosh's guns, and drove them back pell-mell. Branch and Gregg, with their old veterans, sternly held their ground, and, pouring in destructive volleys, the tide of the enemy surged back, and, breaking in confusion, passed out of sight.

During the attack, Pender's brigade was moved from my right to the center, but the enemy were driven back without actively engaging his brigade. The three brigades of my division actively engaged did not number over 2,000 men, and these, with the help of my splendid batteries, drove back Burnside's corps of 15,000 men."<sup>80</sup>

The report prepared by Brigadier General Samuel McGowan concerning operations at Antietam by Gregg's brigade provides excellent detail regarding the actions of the first element of Hill's division to arrive at the Antietam Battlefield.

"On Wednesday we made a forced march up the river, crossed the river at Boteler's Ford, a short distance below Shepherdstown, and arrived on the field of Sharpsburg in the afternoon, about 2 miles from the Potomac, reaching the actual presence of the enemy at 3:40 p.m., which was not a moment too soon for the fortunes of the day. The general line of our army seemed to be in front of the town of Sharpsburg, facing east, with its right flank stretching toward the Potomac. The enemy were in front along the line of the Antietam River. We came upon the field on the extreme right of our line, perhaps 2 miles from the Potomac. It was seen at once that a large force of the enemy (said to be

Burnside's division) were in the act of sweeping down the Antietam and around our right, with the object, manifestly, of cutting off our army from the Potomac. The Light Division came from the proper direction and at the right moment to meet this column and drive it back across the Antietam. Gregg's brigade was placed in position on the right. The Fourteenth South Carolina Volunteers (Lieutenant-Colonel Simpson) being the leading regiment, was thrown out to hold a position on the extreme right, being the point of our line nearest the Potomac. The enemy, checked in his flank movement, never got so far to our right, and consequently that regiment was not actively engaged. The First (Colonel Hamilton), Twelfth (Colonel Barnes), and Thirteenth South Carolina Volunteers (Colonel Edwards) formed in line of battle, and were directed to enter the field to the left of the Fourteenth and drive back the enemy. This line advanced to the top of a hill in a corn-field, and there engaged the enemy, who appeared advancing in force upon the opposite hill, and held a fence in the ravine between the hills. They checked at once the advance of the enemy. Colonel Edwards, on the left, took up a strong position behind a stone fence and held it. Colonel Barnes advanced down the hill, and with a charge gallantly drove the enemy from the fence in front. He was, however, in a few moments flanked by a large body on the right, and had to retire his regiment a short distance up the hill, the enemy immediately reoccupying the fence. Colonel Barnes soon returned to the attack, and upon the same ground charged with his fine regiment three times, and the last time drove them from the fence and up the hill beyond, with great slaughter.

In the meantime Colonel Hamilton, feeling a heavy pressure upon his right, obliqued his regiment in that direction and gallantly drove them, clearing the front and at the same time covering the right of Colonel Barnes. A heavy body now appeared on the right of Colonel Hamilton, and Captain

Perrin, commanding Orr's Rifles, was sent out to sweep the field in that direction. He led his regiment up a hill, discovered the enemy in the hollow beyond, dispersed them at once, and held the position, which was somewhat in advance of the general line. Thus, the columns which were enveloping the right of our army were driven back at all points, and, at the last moment, Sharpsburg made a victory for the Confederate arms."<sup>81</sup>

Colonel D. H. Hamilton who commanded the First Regiment South Carolina Volunteers provides this account of the counterattack.

"We had scarcely reached the field of battle on the right of our line, when a heavy force of the enemy appeared, with the design of outflanking the Confederate forces which had been engaged previous to our arrival on the scene of action. Immediate and prompt measures were taken by Brigadier-General Gregg to engage the enemy, then so near us. I was thrown forward, and, pressing on over fences and every obstacle, reached a high ridge in a corn-field to find a large force (for my regiment to contend with) moving, down upon me and endeavoring to seek such concealment in the corn-field as would enable them to surprise me, but my gallant regiment were too fully alive to the importance of the position which they held, and commenced a deadly fire upon the enemy in the corn-field and on the line of the fence beyond. We had scarcely been fairly engaged, when Major McCreary, who commanded the right wing, came down to inform me that a regiment of the enemy were passing round our flank. I ordered him to throw back the three right companies, in order that a front might be presented to the enemy, and immediately open fire upon them, cutting them down as fast as they attempted to form on the edge of the corn-field, in the open ground. The fire from my regiment was rapid, and ammunition commenced to fail and the charges to clog in the rifles. In some instances the men were obliged to use stones to hammer the charges down. Just at this time, it was reported to me by one of my officers that another regiment

had gained the hill in my rear. This sounded like danger. I looked, but instead of the enemy there floated our own bonny blue flag. The Rifles had come to our assistance, and not one moment too soon, for in a few moments my fire must have ceased for want of ammunition. {he enemy soon retired, dark came on, and we slept upon the field of battle."82

Colonel James M. Perrin, commander of the First South Carolina Rifles followed Hamilton's regiment into the counterattack. He made this report.

"The brigade reached the battle-field about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and immediately afterward our line was formed. I was ordered to advance my regiment across the corn-field in front on the right of Colonel Hamilton, First South Carolina Volunteers, who had preceeded me by a few minutes. The regiment advanced across the field in good order moving rapidly, as Colonel Hamilton, on our left, had already engaged the enemy. So soon as we ascended to the crest of the hill in our front, we discovered a regiment of the enemy who had succeeded in turning Colonel Hamilton's right, and were delivering a destructive fire on his flank. Our advance was such as to completely turn the left flank of this regiment. We delivered a destructive volley into it before our presence seemed to be realized. The first volley was followed by a sharp fire from our side, which the enemy at first attempted to return; but so great was the confusion caused by our fire, this large, well equipped regiment failed to rally, broke and fled from the field in the utmost confusion, leaving their guns, knapsacks, and dead and wounded in large numbers on the field. We succeeded in capturing 11 prisoners, among them Captain Bowen, of Rhode Island, who had been slightly wounded in the action.

In this engagement we had only 1 man killed with—wounded, most of them slightly. This inconsiderable loss, in my judgment, is attributable to the prompt and effective fire of the regiment."83

Major W. H. McCorkle who took command of the Twelfth South Carolina Infantry at Antietam gave this report.

"About 3 p.m. we arrived, with the Second Brigade, on the field of battle. Immediately, by order of the Brigadier-General Gregg, skirmishers, under the command of Capt. John L. Miller, were thrown out. The position of the enemy being soon ascertained, they were called in, and a line of battle formed of three regiments, to wit, the Thirteenth, Twelfth, and First, the Twelfth being the center and the regiment of direction. In obedience to orders, we advanced to the top of the hill, in the corn-field, and there halted, a few moments, when the firing commenced. The enemy now appearing in force on the opposite hill, and at the fence in the intervening ravine, the Twelfth, at once and alone, advanced down the hill and to the fence in front. In this charge we were subjected to a terrible cross-fire in front and from both flanks. After reaching the fence we were compelled to fall back to prevent being flanked on the right, the enemy on the left having been driven back. The enemy, being soon re-enforced, advanced toward us as far as the fence. Now we again charged on them and drove them back a short distance, but were not able to reach the fence, as in the first charge. There being a very heavy flank movement on the right, we again fell back near the top of the hill. Now the enemy advanced over the fence, when the Twelfth, again and for the third time, charged upon them and drove them beyond the fence, with great slaughter, putting them completely to rout as they ran through the plowed ground and up the opposite hill.

In these charges the regiment suffered severely. In the last the loss was very heavy. Here fell Col. Dixon Barnes, at the head of his regiment, gallantly cheering his men on to victory . . . Colonel Barnes having fallen, I immediately assumed command."<sup>84</sup>



Colonel O. E. Edwards, commander of the Thirteenth South Carolina Infantry reported his regiment's actions in this report.

"At 6:15 a.m., September 17, my regiment, in its brigade, and division, took up line of march from Harper's Ferry toward Boteler's Ford, across the Potomac, near Shepherdstown, W. Va. Crossed the ford at 2 p.m., and at quick step reached the presence of the enemy at 3:40 [o'clock], about 2 miles beyond the river. Here we reached the range of the enemy's shell, and, turning to our left, took position along a line of fence in line of battle, from which point we advanced to drive the enemy from the corn-fields in front, my regiment having the left of the brigade. The enemy falling back before us, we took position on the summit of an elevation along the fence line on the edge of the corn, and there received the enemy upon our left, drove him back across the field, and held the ground until the action closed, about 8 p.m.

Our position in this action was the extreme right of the Confederate line of battle, and we successfully met and repulsed a dangerous flank movement of the enemy, conducted, as prisoners state, by General Burnside with his forces."<sup>85</sup>

Although Gregg's remaining regiment the Fourteenth South Carolina Volunteers did not actively participate in the battle, their adjutant's report is included.

"The regiment occupied a position on the right of the brigade, and so far on the right of the line of battle that it was not actively engaged, as was the balance of the brigade. One company (E) was detached on picket, and sent half a mile on the extreme right from the regiment, where it remained until the next morning. Lieut. Col. W. D. Simpson was in command of the regiment. There was no loss sustained either in killed, wounded, or mission."<sup>86</sup>

As a detailed summary of Gregg's brigade's action at Antietam the following excerpt from the brigade's official history is included.

"Early on the morning of the 17th (Wednesday) Gregg's brigade was put in motion up the road towards Shepherdstown. The day was hot and dusty in the extreme. All along the way we heard the boom of cannon, almost in our front. This fact, in conjunction with the rapid march, assured us that fighting was ahead of us. Pressing forward at a rapid gait, and but two or three times halting to draw breath, we reached the Potomac about 2 P.M., at Boteler's Ford. We waded the river at once and rapidly, although the current was quite swift, and the ledges of rock, cropping out at a sharp angle, rendered the passage both difficult and painful. Climbing up the slippery bank on the Maryland side, we proceeded at once to the scene of action.

It is scarcely necessary to say that the battle of Sharpsburg was now raging with greatest fury. The vast army of McClellan, (nearly, if not quite, treble ours,) after failing to break the line of the Confederates, was stretching round to the right of Lee, with the evident intention of cutting us off from the Potomac. The five brigades of A. P. Hill's division (Thomas's had been left at Harper's Ferry) were despatched at once by Gen. Lee to this point. Pender and Brockenborough were posted on the extreme right, near the mouth of Antietam creek. Branch, Gregg and Archer were placed on their left, connected with the division commanded by D. R. Jones. A few shells were thrown over us as we moved to our position, but no casualties occurred, as far as I know. The Fourteenth regiment led.

Leaving the narrow country road, the brigade was carried over one of the many steep hills that characterize that country, and arranged for battle. The Fourteenth regiment was posted behind a low stone fence, on the right of the brigade, and nearly at right angles with the front of the other regiments. Below us stretched a wide field of luxuriant corn, and beyond it was a clear space of varying breadth, out of which rose numerous hills like those in rear,

clear of trees. Into the cornfield the First, Twelfth, and Thirteenth regiments were advanced in line of battle, to drive off the enemy. The line reached the top of a small eminence in the cornfield, and soon engaged the Federal line moving through the corn. The Thirteenth regiment held a stone fence on the left. Col. Barnes, with the Twelfth regiment, charged the enemy, driving him rapidly from the stone fence he occupied just beyond us. There was some difference of opinion at this time as to Gen. Gregg's orders, Col. Edwards regarding them as defensive, Col. Barnes as offensive. I am not able to say which was right. Col. Hamilton advanced the First regiment nearly abreast with the Twelfth. But the Twelfth soon outflanked itself by its rapid dash into the enemy's line, and had to be withdrawn a space. After a little time, however, Col. Barnes returned to the attack, and this time drove away the force which had occupied the fence on his retirement, pursuing them to the opposite hill and inflicting a heavy loss upon them.

A considerable pressure was now brought to bear upon the right of the First regiment. Col. Hamilton changed his front slightly to meet it, and swept the obnoxious line from the field, with great loss to it. This movement also secured Col. Barnes' right from further molestation. Hardly, however, had it been executed, when a line of Federals came hurrying down on the right of the First regiment, threatening soon to enfilade their line. Gen. Gregg now despatched Capt. Perrin with Orr's Rifles after them. The Rifles fell upon this line, almost completely flanking the flankers, and after a short, sharp fire, dispersed them in irretrievable order.

The firing during this period, which was about an hour, was as rapid as possible, and on our side unusually accurate. So dense was the corn that the lines sometimes approached within thirty or forty yards of each other before opening. We had somewhat the advantage, for the enemy descending to attack

us, naturally fired too high, while we had either a level or a rise to fire on. I need not explain this, for it is a universally known fact, that men fire above their own levels. And when the enemy retreated they had to pass through open ground, which enabled us to kill large numbers of them. But our object was entirely defensive. It was enough, fully enough, for this division to save the right flank of the army. Hitherto, McClellan had seriously endangered the whole of Lee's Line, by driving so persistently around towards the Potomac. Had he succeeded, the Army of Northern Virginia must have been lost beyond a peradventure. The pressure was heavy enough all along our line, for, kill as we would, new lines constantly replaced the beaten ones of the enemy; but nowhere was there such peril to us as on the extreme right . . .

McIntosh's battery, which, it will be borne in mind, was manned by one of the eleven original companies of the First regiment, did good service on the left of the division. At one time, no support being given them, they fought the enemy's infantry single-handed, until, overwhelmed by numbers and exhausted of ammunition, they were forced to retire with their caissons and limbers. But, before they did give way, they double-charged their pieces and dealt destruction among the enemy. A member of the battery told me that he counted forty Federal corpses in one group, where the double-shot was discharged. Archer's brigade soon charged the enemy, and recovered the pieces.

The enemy never attacked the stone fence held by the Fourteenth regiment, so they were not engaged, and lost no men. The artillery fired a good deal over them, but principally at a battery of one or two guns stationed on the hill immediately in rear of them. We slept upon the field."<sup>87</sup>

Deploying to the left of Gregg's brigade was Branch's brigade commanded by Brigadier General L. O'Brien Branch. Branch was killed during the counter-attack and the report which follows was prepared by his successor Brigadier General James H. Lane.

"We left Harper's Ferry on September 17, and after a very rapid and fatiguing march, recrossed the Potomac and reached Sharpsburg in time to participate in the fight. The entire brigade was ordered to the right, and, on reaching the field, the Twenty-eighth was detached by General A. P. Hill, in person, and sent on the road to the left leading to Sharpsburg to repel the enemy's skirmishers, who were advancing through a field of corn. The rest of the brigade moved nearly at right angles to our line, and on the enemy's flank. The Thirty-third, Seventh, and Thirty-seventh were the regiments principally engaged. They fought well, and assisted in driving back three separate and distinct columns of the enemy. The Eighteenth was not actively engaged. I was ordered, about sunset, to rejoin the brigade, and on doing so ascertained that General Branch had been killed. It was after sunset when I assumed command of the brigade. I found the Seventh, Thirty-seventh, and Thirty-third posted behind a stone fence, and the Eighteenth sheltered in a hollow in rear. I ordered the Twenty-eighth to the left of the line, but the order was delivered to the Eighteenth, which was posted to the left behind a rail fence, a portion of it being broken back to guard against a flank movement." The Twenty-eighth was posted to the left of the Seventh, in the opening caused by the withdrawal of a few Georgia troops. Although annoyed by the enemy's sharpshooters, we held our position until ordered to fall back, on the night of the 18th."<sup>88</sup>

Following Branch's brigade in the counterattack were the Tennessee and Georgia regiments of Archer's brigade, commanded by Brigadier General James J. Archer. His report follows.

"The next morning after the capture of Harper's Ferry, being too unwell for duty, I turned over the command of the brigade to Colonel Turney (First Tennessee), under whom, with the exception of the Fifth Alabama, it marched to the battlefield of Sharpsburg, while I followed in an ambulance. This was a long and fatiguing march; many of the men fell, exhausted from the march, by

the way, so that when the four regiments of my brigade reached the battle-field there were only 350 men. I resumed command just as the brigade was forming into line on the ground assigned to it by General Hill, on the extreme left of his division, but not in sight of any of its other brigades. Marching by flank, right in front, along the Sharpsburg road, the brigade was halted and faced to the right, forming line of battle faced by the rear rank. General Toombs was in line on the same road about 300 yards to my left, with open ground in front. In front of my position was a narrow corn-field about 100 yards wide, then a plowed field about 300 yards wide, on the opposite side of which was a stone fence. I moved forward, under a scattering musket fire, through the tall corn to the edge of the plowed field, when I found only the right regiment (the Fourteenth Tennessee) with me, the others having fallen back to the road. Some one had called out, "Fall back," which was mistaken for an order from me. I reformed the line as rapidly as possible, and again moved forward against the enemy, posted in force behind the stone fence. In passing over the short distance of 250 yards from the corn-field, I lost nearly one-third of my already greatly reduced command, but it rushed forward alone at double-quick, giving the enemy but little time to estimate its small numbers and drove him from his strong position. By this time it was nearly sunset. General Branch's brigade came down about thirty minutes after I reached the wall, and formed some 30 paces to my rear, when General Branch was killed, and Colonel Lane, assuming command of his brigade, moved it down to my left.

The next morning about 9 o'clock, the little strength with which I entered the fight being completely exhausted, I turned over the command to Colonel Turney, reported to the major-general commanding, and left the field. My brigade remained all that day in the same position where I had left it, and

on the morning of September 19, together with Gregg's and Branch's brigades, formed the rear guard of the army on its return to the Virginia shore."<sup>89</sup>

Neither Pender's or Brockenbaugh's brigades were actively engaged at Antietam on the Seventeenth.

General Lee's letter to Jefferson Davis describes the actions involved in this last phase of the battle at Antietam and the Army of Northern Virginia's subsequent withdrawal west across the Potomac River on 19 September.

"While the attack on the center and left was in progress, the enemy made repeated efforts to force the passage of the bridge over the Antietam, opposite the right wing of General Longstreet, commanded by Brig. Gen. D. R. Jones. This bridge was defended by General Toombs with two regiments of his brigade (the Second and Twentieth Georgia) and two batteries of General Jones. General Toombs' small command repulsed five different assaults made by greatly superior force, and maintained its position with distinguished gallantry.

In the afternoon the enemy began to extend his line as if to cross the Antietam below the bridge, and at 4 p.m. Toombs' regiments retired from the position they had so bravely held. The enemy immediately crossed the bridge in large numbers and advanced against General Jones, who held the crest with less than 2,000 men. After a determined and brave resistance, he was forced to give way, and the enemy gained the summit.

General A. P. Hill had arrived from Harper's Ferry, having left that place at 7:30 a.m. He was now ordered to re-enforce General Jones, and moved to his support with the brigades of Archer, Branch, Gregg, and Pender, the last of whom was placed on the right of the line, and the other three advanced and attacked the enemy, now flushed with success. Hill's batteries were thrown forward and united their fire with those of General Jones, and one of General D. H. Hill's also opened with good effect from the left of the Boonsborough road. The progress of the enemy was immediately arrested and his lines began to waver. At this moment General Jones ordered Toombs to charge the

blank, while Archer, supported by Branch and Gregg, moved upon the front of the Federal line. The enemy made a brief resistance, then broke and retreated in confusion toward the Antietam, pursued by the troops of Hill and Jones, until he reached the protection of his batteries on the opposite side of the river. In this attack the brave and lamented Brig. Gen. L. O'B. Branch was killed, gallantly leading his brigade.

It was now nearly dark, and the enemy had massed a number of batteries to sweep the approaches to the Antietam, on the opposite side of which the corps of General Porter, which had not been engaged, now appeared to dispute our advance. Our troops were much exhausted and greatly reduced in numbers by fatigue and the casualties of battle. Under these circumstances it was deemed injudicious to push our advantage further in the face of fresh troops of the enemy, much exceeding the number of our own. They were accordingly recalled and formed on the line originally held by General Jones . . .

On the 18th we occupied the position of the preceding day, except in the center, where our line was drawn in about 200 yards. Our ranks were increased by the arrival of a number of troops, who had not been engaged the day before, and, though still too weak to assume the offensive, we awaited without apprehension the renewal of the attack. The day passed without any demonstration on the part of the enemy, who, from the reports received, was expecting the arrival of re-enforcements. As we could not look for a material increase in strength, and the enemy's force could be largely and rapidly augmented, it was not thought prudent to wait until he should be ready again to offer battle. During the night of the 18th the army was accordingly withdrawn to the south side of the Potomac, crossing near Shepherdstown, without loss or molestation.

The enemy advanced the next morning, but was held in check by General Fitzbugh Lee with his cavalry, who covered our movement with boldness and success . . .



The condition of our troops now demanded repose, and the army marched to the Opequon, near Martinsburg, where it remained several days, and then moved to the vicinity of Bunker Hill and Winchester. The enemy seemed to be concentrating in and near Harper's Ferry, but made no forward movement."<sup>90</sup>

There is little question that the timely arrival of A. P. Hill's Light Division from Harpers Ferry saved the Army of Northern Virginia from a catastrophic battlefield defeat. As it had happened at Second Manassas, Harpers Ferry and as would again occur in future battles, A. P. Hill arrived at the scene of battle at the decisive moment. This as well as other more personal facts are conveyed in these accounts of the battle by Henry Ryd Douglas.

"Since early morning General Ambrose E. Burnside with a corps of 13,000 men had been lying on the opposite side of the Antietam, looking for an opportunity to get across a bridge, which is now—is it sarcasm?—called Burnside's Bridge. Why the bridge? It was no pass of Thermopylae. Go look at it and tell me if you don't think Burnside and his corps might have executed a hop, skip, and jump and landed on the other side. One thing is certain, they might have waded it that day without getting their waist belts wet in any place.

What puzzles me, said an officer of the United States Army to me years after, is how did Burnside keep his troops from breaking over.

Toombs with his few troops was watching and Jones (D. R.) had his little division of 2,500—at least those who had not been sent to Jackson. Not getting over until one o'clock Burnside did not advance until three . . .

As I went to put the guns in the position indicated, I saw Burnside's heavy line move up the hill. At that moment he had almost as many troops as Lee had in his whole line of battle . . . They pressed on past Sharpsburg and on toward Lee's line of retreat. Graham's guns tore holes in their ranks, but did not stay them. Just then A. P. Hill in his red and picturesque battle shirt, with 2,500 of his men, who had marched seventeen miles that day and waded the Potomac River, appeared upon the scene. He recognized the situation

and without waiting for the rest of the division and without a breathing spell he threw his column into lines and moved against the enemy, taking no note of their numbers. The men rose to the occasion and at that supreme moment forgot all their woes. Three brigades of The Light Division threw themselves upon Burnside's splendid corps. The blue line paused, stopped, hesitated, and hesitating was lost. Jones rallied on Hill and they drove Burnside back to the Antietam and the protection of his heavy guns so rapidly that Hill's other brigades could not catch up and get a share in the fighting. Hill struck the last blow and the battle was ended. For the day, McClellan's grand army was beaten.

In the address General A. P. Hill issued to the Soldiers of the Light Division on the 24th of September, he may be pardoned for this compliment to them. You have done well and I am pleased with you. You have fought in every battle from Mechanicsville to Shepherdstown and no one can say that the Light Division was ever broken. You held the left at Manassas and saved the day. You saved the day at Sharpsburg and Shepherdstown. And it may be said that every brigade that fought at Dunker Church or Bloody Lane, merited an equal compliment. A Northern critic, with some bitterness toward General McClellan has said that the battle of Antietam on the Union side was the grandest failure of the war. This may be well disputed and confuted. However on the Confederate side, Sharpsburg was unquestionably the best fought battle of the war.<sup>91</sup>

That Amrose Powell Hill was a thorn in McClellan's side at Antietam is an incontrovertible fact. That he had been ever present at the critical time on other battlefields on which he opposed his former West Point classmate is also a fact. One story related by Douglas in his book about Stonewall Jackson puts the Hill-McClellan conflict in humorous if not altogether factual terms.

"At dinner one day, Colonel Wright told a story of the Army of the Potomac, in repeating which I am not conscious of any indeliacy in mentioning

the name of a lady. It was told in the presence of General McClellan. There was a report in the Army of the Potomac—whether true or not matters not in this connection—that General McClellan and General A. P. Hill were both in love with the beautiful Miss Nellie Marcy, daughter of General Marcy, when they were at West Point, that she smiled on both these gallant gentlemen, for they were equally attractive, but that in the end she married McClellan. It so happened that in all McClellan's campaigns around Richmond (as well as at Sharpsburg), Hill was always to the fore, and it seemed that whether struck in the front, flank, or rear, especially early in the morning, it was by A. P. Hill. McClellan's soldiers began to get tired of this sort of thing, and attributed it to spite and vengeance on the part of Hill. Early one gloomy morning, before the sun had appeared, there were shots of artillery and rattle of musketry which told of a spirited attack. Hill was at it again. The long roll was beaten, there was commotion and confusion and a rush to arms, in the midst of which one hardened old veteran unrolled himself from his blanket and in an inimitable tone of weariness and disgust, cried out, 'My God, Nelly, why didn't you marry him!'

As the laughter went round the table General McClellan joined with a smile and said, 'Fiction no doubt, but surely no one could have married a more gallant soldier than A. P. Hill.'"<sup>92</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

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## CHAPTER V

### REFLECTIONS

The following is a summary of my impressions of the Antietam Battle. It is divided into three sections: an analysis of the battle using the principles of war; and lessons learned from this battle which have application in modern warfare; and summary comments.

#### A. AN ANALYSIS OF THE BATTLE USING THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR

I have deliberately constrained the preponderance of this analysis to the tactical dimension, since the engagement on the Battlefield, e.g., corps and below, was tactical only. However, in some instances strategic and operational dimensions attendant to Antietam and Lee's Maryland Campaign are simply too significant to avoid.

##### 1. Objective: "Direct Every Military Operation Toward A Clearly Defined Decisive and Attainable Objective."

To put the Battle of Antietam in its proper context it must be first addressed in view of its strategic and operational significance.

In the late summer of 1862 Lee (as Davis' de facto Secretary of War) established three strategic objectives;

- Take the war to the North so as to demoralize her people and reduce their will to resist; gain the popular support of the people of Maryland.

- Harass the Army of the Potomac, thereby, placing the Union capital in jeopardy.

- Gain European recognition and support for the Confederate cause.

To accomplish these objectives, Lee realized he must act quickly before the Union could realize its great mobilization potential. To act quickly meant taking risks; and his development, as well as execution, of the resulting Maryland Campaign was a clear reflection of those objectives and risks.

Lee's adoption of the defensive at Antietam was not part of his initial campaign plan. It was the result of lost initiative, lost because the order detailing his campaign concept was compromised at the very outset. McClellan knew Lee's plan!

Aware that McClellan knew his plan, Lee opted tactically to defend at Antietam for two reasons. First, to gain time and reunite his fragmented army. Second, to hopefully defeat McClellan if he attacked and subsequently

regain the initiative. If he (Lee) could do that, he would then be able to modify his operational concept (campaign plan) and continue in pursuit of his original strategic objectives.

General McClellan, on the other hand, had two strategic objectives—first and foremost, to protect the capital (this was a somewhat unnecessary objective since the district garrison had more than sufficient combat power alone to withstand a siege by Lee's Army of Northern Virginia) and to destroy Lee's army. General McClellan was an extraordinarily cautious man and he was none too anxious to confront Robert Lee on a battlefield without every advantage resting with him. Antietam gave him that opportunity. He knew Lee's precise order of battle, although he consistently exaggerated his numerical strength. He knew Lee's overall plan and he knew where Lee's forces were located. And, he had a clear numerical advantage of more than 2.5 to 1 on September 17, 1862.

Knowing the strategic and operational setting leading up to September 17, it is obvious that McClellan had to attack. While his plan as written in the Official Records fails to specify a tactical objective, it should have been to destroy the Army of Northern Virginia. However, McClellan's plan insofar as the Ninth Corps and Burnside were concerned and as extracted from the amended records, indicates only his general scheme for maneuvering his corps.

"My plan for the impending general engagement was to attack the enemy's left with the corps of Hooker and Mansfield, supported by Sumner's and, if necessary, by Franklin's, and, as soon as matters looked favorable there, to move the corps of Burnside against the enemy's extreme right, upon the ridge running to the south and rear of Sharpsburg, and, having carried their position, to press along the crest toward our right, and, whenever either of these flank movements should be successful, to advance our center with all the forces then disposable."<sup>1</sup>

In short, there was no stated tactical objective for the Army of the Potomac. McClellan goes on to explain that Burnside's Corps was: "to carry the bridge and move along the ridge running to the south of Sharpsburg."<sup>2</sup> The latter as a tactical objective is both attainable and reasonably clear, at least in regard to the seizure of the bridge. The former, (carrying the bridge), was difficult to attain and also unnecessary given the number of fording sites available and the shallow depth of the water all along the Antietam. But this tactical fixation on the bridge constrained the initial attacks to failure and perhaps, more importantly, wasted valuable time in prosecuting the attack west of the Antietam.

One of the most contentious aspects of McClellan's order was the time he expected Burnside to attack. The records clearly indicate that McClellan initially told Burnside to be prepared to attack in the morning. This Burnside did. But the attack order was not initiated until after 10:00 a.m., a full four hours after Hooker had started his attack in the north. This lack

of synchronization of effort was in no small measure due to a lack of specificity in McClellan's instructions to Burnside.

On the Confederate side, an understanding of the objective was never the problem. In fact, the actions of subordinate leaders down to brigade and regimental level clearly showed that each understood the intent of their commander. This clarity of understanding was manifested by initiative and audacity. Toombs, Jenkins, Jones and Hill all demonstrated a degree of initiative that comes only with a confidence associated with an understanding of the intentions of a superior. They knew what Lee wanted and demanded and he got it.

## 2. Offensive: "Seize, retain and exploit the initiative."

No American military leader has embodied the spirit of the offensive to a greater extent than Robert E. Lee. Some would say Lee's obsession with the offensive even when the defense was clearly warranted, as at Gettysburg, was a major flaw in his generalship. Nonetheless, for reasons previously explained Lee was forced to abandon the strategic/operational offensive and defend at Antietam. But even when defending, Lee used offensive action whenever possible.

The counterattack is the favored offensive tactic when defending and Lee used this tactic with unparalleled skill at Antietam. Throughout the morning Lee counterattacked repetitively with forces from other parts of his defense which were not being engaged by the Union forces. Of prime importance to Longstreet's wing was Lee's use of General J. G. Walker's division to counterattack in support of Jackson in the West Woods. Walker was summoned by Lee sometime prior to 9:00 a.m. and left his position on the Confederate right flank, guarding Snively's Ford, and moving parallel to the rebel line of defense assisted McLaw's division in counterattacking the flank of Sedgwick's division.

Other examples of divisional counterattacks included those executed by the divisions of Hood, D. H. Hill and J. R. Jones. In almost every case, Lee used the counterattack to regain the initiative from the attacker and seize lost terrain. Of course, on the Confederate right flank it was A. P. Hill's successful counterattack against Burnside's Ninth Corps that saved the Army of Northern Virginia from being cut off from its line of retreat and ultimate defeat, if not destruction.

If Lee personified offensive action, his opponent, Major General George McClellan, was the antithesis—slow, cautious, indecisive and above all lacking in audacity. Not only was McClellan aware that Lee had violated the fundamental principle of mass and split his forces, thereby, leaving his army in jeopardy of being defeated in detail, but he also knew Lee's full order of battle and intention. Armed with such knowledge which Lee's lost order gave him, any commander other than McClellan would immediately seize upon the opportunity which fate presented and seek to quickly destroy the fragmented elements of his opponent's command. McClellan let valuable operational time slip away and failed to exploit the advantage which he initially held on September 15th and 16th.

Once the battle was joined tactically, McClellan continued to avoid winning. I say he avoided winning because on at least three separate occa-

sions victory was within his grasp if only he had elected to reinforce success. Tactically, the reserve is committed at that 'window of opportunity' on the battlefield when the momentum of the attack needs to be reinforced to achieve decisive results. Throughout the entire day at Antietam McClellan, ever cautious and not prone to take risks no matter how well justified, kept Porter's corps and Pleasonton's cavalry division in reserve. If he had committed Porter's corps to reinforce the success enjoyed by Greene's division against the Confederate left flank, or the penetration of the Confederate's lightly held center at Bloody Lane by Richardson's division through the added weight of another corps at these decisive points there is little doubt that such action would have achieved the victory which McClellan sought.

Assessing the zone of action assigned to the Ninth Corps, it is somewhat incredulous that McClellan opted not to reinforce the success which he could see evolving before his own eyes. But, again he failed to commit Porter's corps even when Burnside made a plea for such reinforcement (albeit for the wrong reasons). This is all the more incredulous in view of McClellan's stated commitment to reinforce the Ninth Corps, which was written in his earlier order to attack.

As for Burnside, he lost his best and perhaps only opportunity for success by not immediately following up his success after finally securing the bridge and bridgehead west of the Antietam. The more than two hours that elapsed subsequent to gaining this bridgehead resulted in a further loss of momentum, initiative and time.

But, this was not Burnside's only failure to reinforce battlefield success at Antietam. A second and equally significant failure occurred during Fairchild's successful attack in the Ninth Corps center. At this point in the battle, Burnside had only two committed divisions—Rodman's attacking on the corps' left with Harland's brigade and in the center with Fairchild's brigade, and Willcox's division, attacking with Welch and Christ astride the Boonesboro Road. If Burnside had been in a position to observe his attacking forces he would have seen the success enjoyed by Fairchild's brigade. If he had committed Sturgis's division along the same axis, it is doubtful whether A. P. Hill's counterattack could have had the effect which it did. The rationale that Sturgis' division had been seriously depleted during the seizure of the bridge simply does not have much credibility when casualty statistics are reviewed.

One concluding comment in regard to offensive action and the Ninth Corps is needed. If the offensive spirit was lacking at the corps and army level, it was not at division level and below, even down to the individual Union soldier. Given the constraints placed on them from above, the officers and men at these levels performed with great initiative, audacity and courage--the essence of offensive warfare.

### 3. Mass: "Concentrate combat power at the decisive place and time."

Mass is concentrated combat power and combat power is the integration of maneuver, firepower, protection and leadership.

How well did the south apply this principle at the tactical level? Certainly, in the positioning of their forces in the defense Longstreet, as the commander on the Confederate right and D. R. Jones as the sole divisional

commander on this flank (following the redeployment of Walker's division), made two fundamental errors in regard to the application of mass. The most obvious was their failure to augment Toombs upon the departure of Walker's division, thereby, insuring the continuing and adequate defence of Snively's Ford.

Obviously, the two critical points along Antietam Creek—Burnside's Bridge and Snively's Ford—had been appropriately identified and defended against initially. Firepower in the form of two and possibly three artillery batteries were at various times prior to 1:00 p.m. focused on the bridge. These batteries included Eubanks and those from the Washington Artillery located at the current National Cemetery. Until he departed under Lee's orders Walker had two artillery batteries, those of Ransom and Manning trained on Snively's Ford. The batteries of Richardson and Eshleman were positioned in depth behind Toomb's brigade and capable of reinforcing the firepower of Walker's artillery if needed. But, once Walker's force left their assigned sector, neither Longstreet or Jones opted to take up the vacuum by repositioning any one of four available brigades at the Snively Ford position. Accordingly, Toombs was virtually required to further deplete his already meager force in an attempt to at least outpost the vacated position. This meant that Longstreet was defending along the most defensible terrain for infantry fire in a sector extending over three miles with a single understrength brigade. And, that brigade was for all intents massed at the bridge site.

The point just made about the most defensible terrain being that along the west bank of the Antietam raises the issue of the second failure. Why did Longstreet not defend in his sector well forward along the high ground west of the Antietam? Not only is the Antietam a minor obstacle, but the steepness of the terrain on the west bank enhances the Creek's obstacle value and makes it ideal for infantry defenders.

Lee also opted not to entrench or prepare breastworks. The manner in which he fought the battle clearly shows that he intended to fight a highly flexible and mobile defense, one in which static defensive positions played no part. In so doing, Lee sacrificed the protection that could have been afforded his defenders. Lee also sacrificed the favorable static defensive position immediately west of the Antietam in order to obtain sufficient maneuver space for offensive action.

The value of static entrenched defensive positions along the Antietam was graphically demonstrated by Toombs' successful defense of his position at the bridge against three successive attacks by the Ninth Corps. These attacks extended over a period of four hours.

To point to the obvious and contend that Hill's successful counterattack against the Ninth Corps vindicated Lee's decision to conduct a mobile defense and demonstrated Lee's appropriate appreciation of mass in that he concentrated combat power at the decisive place and time is specious at best. First, Lee took an absolutely irresponsible risk in operating without a dedicated reserve. Hill's arrival at precisely the critical time in the battle for the Confederate right was more luck than good generalship. Second, Lee's failure to protect his forces by making them dig-in and its adverse effect on combat power probably was not sufficiently offset by any advantage which he gained by defending on terrain conducive to maneuver. Accordingly, Lee

sacrificed his potential for mass by opting not to defend from static positions. Third, by using a mobile defense, Lee made the synchronization of his artillery fire support and infantry fire less effective than they would have been if the infantry were positioned initially in protected, forward positions.

Finally, Lee could have employed maximum forces forward initially and then moved to secondary positions along the Harpers Ferry Road from which to conduct his mobile defense. By so doing, he could have optimized the effectiveness of his available mass throughout the depth of the sector adjusting his defensive technique to the advantages offered by the terrain, first forward and then at depth.

From the perspective of the South, one should not conclude that the principle of mass was properly applied just because Hill and Toombs were able to mass combat power at the decisive point and time to defeat the North. I contend that a proper application of mass would have led to even greater success for the Army of Northern Virginia.

If the Confederate forces on the right failed to fully or appropriately apply the principle of mass, then the Union forces, it can be argued, never applied this principle.

One only has to look at Burnside's concept for seizing the bridge now bearing his name to understand that he had little appreciation for the principle of mass. From 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m., Burnside and the Ninth Corps consisting of more than 12,000 Union soldiers made three assaults to seize the bridge which was defended by less than 400 Confederate soldiers; only on the third attempt were they successful.

Again it is useful to look at the definition of mass to see why Burnside failed in its application. Consider the phrase, concentrating combat power at the appropriate place, only. Available to Burnside in making the attack were four divisions, each comprised of two brigades. During each of the attacks at the bridge no more than one brigade at a time was committed in the assault and in every instance no more than two regiments within that brigade were effectively employed. Why? Simply stated, the bridge was no more than 12 feet wide and could accommodate no more. In effect, this meant that Toombs' well entrenched force, positioned to bring plunging rifle fire down on the assaulting regiments and further supported by two and sometimes three batteries of artillery was able to effectively defend against a force more than 30 times greater than its own. In fact, there are those who would argue that if Toombs had been resupplied with ammunition and if Rodman's division had not successfully crossed Snavelly's Ford thereby threatening Toombs right flank, Toombs probably could have successfully defended a third time, maybe more.

Burnside failed at the bridge because he concentrated on the bridge and not the terrain beyond. The bridge was a meaningless objective especially in view of the limited obstacle value to infantry which was posed by the creek.

What should Burnside have done? In my opinion he should have deployed Rodman's division and one brigade from the Kanawha Division to positions south of Snavelly's Ford by 7:00 a.m. for the purpose of making a supporting attack. Three brigades should have been positioned in defilade behind the high ground

east of the Antietam: one brigade centered on the bridge, one brigade astride the valley as it enters the Antietam approximately 500 meters north of the bridge, and a third brigade 500 to 600 meters south of the bridge oriented on a small salient located there. All available artillery should have been positioned to bring its firepower to bear on the entire length of the Confederate positions north, south and on the bridge. At a predetermined time or signal the Ninth Corps would launch a coordinated attack first to seize the high ground immediately west overlooking the Antietam and then on order to continue the attack to seize the ridge running south from Sharpsburg as defined by the Sharpsburg—Harpers Ferry Road. Artillery batteries would displace on order to support the continuation of the attack. The division in reserve would be positioned well forward initially to be prepared to reinforce the success of any of the forward brigades.

If Burnside had employed such a concept there was simply no way that Toombs' force or his supporting artillery could have prevented any more than one of the brigades from seizing their initial objectives. Burnside would have achieved this by the proper maneuver of 75 per cent of his corps, the concentrated employment of his artillery, the retention of a sufficient reserve to reinforce success, and attack would be the provision of sufficient maneuver space for his forces. This scheme would also render Toombs incapable of bringing sufficient mass to bear along the entirety of Burnside's attacking echelon to have any realistic hope of conducting a successful defense.

Aside from the fiasco at the bridge, Burnside's second major failure to apply mass occurred when Fairchild had successfully dislodged Kemper and Drayton's brigades which were defending along the Harpers Ferry Road. As mentioned previously when discussing the offensive, Burnside should have had, and could have had, his reserve division (Sturgis) following in the center, thereby positioned to reinforce Fairchild's success. However, Burnside failed to bring Sturgis forward and as a consequence he lacked the combat power when and where it was needed to be decisive.

#### 4. Economy of Force: "Allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts."

The principle of economy of force was brilliantly displayed by the South's senior leadership, starting with Lee's employment of a single understrength division against a far numerically superior Union corps and terminating with Toombs' unexpectedly successful defense at the bridge.

In the latter case one could argue that Toombs success as an economy of force was more due to Burnside's incompetence than Toombs' competence. Nonetheless, Toombs did succeed and allowed the Confederate right to husband their scarce resources until A. P. Hill arrived from Harpers Ferry.

In contrast, one could also argue that Burnside was himself fighting an economy of force mission given the paucity of combat power which he concentrated at the bridge during each of the three attacks. A more serious appraisal of the Ninth Corps operation shows that it did not employ any economy of force measures although some were clearly warranted. For example, a single brigade could have been given the mission of blocking Hill's counterattack

while continuing the attack in Fairchild's zone of action. This was not done or even considered.

5. Maneuver: "Place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power."

In many respects the previous discussions of the principles of mass and the offensive have touched on many of the instances in which the principles of maneuver was either applied or violated.

Maneuver is the dynamic and creative element of ground combat. It contributes to gaining or maintaining the initiative, securing freedom of action and exploiting success. It is not surprising then that, when confronted with the necessity of defending, Robert E. Lee opted to conduct his defense using maneuver as its key component. His ability to shift forces to threatened points on the battlefield at critical moments gave him the necessary mass to counter the enemy at those vital points and yet employ economy of force measures to secure those parts of the line which were less threatened. Obviously the most significant maneuver employed by Lee on the Confederate right was the counterattack by Toombs' brigade and A. P. Hill's division.

Subordinate in importance to those two counterattacks but a maneuver of vital importance at the time was Jenkins' maneuver to provide enfilading fire against Welch's brigade as it attacked up the valley toward Sharpsburg.

But one should also remember that Lee's sagacious use and deployment of artillery on this flank constituted yet another form of maneuver. The frequent shifting of the Washington Artillery and S. D. Lee's artillery not only helped insure their survivability but more importantly placed them in good positions to use enfilading fire on the infantry of Burnside's attacking corps.

Effective maneuver simply was not the strong suit of the Ninth Corps' commander. His choice of two direct frontal attacks against the strength of the Confederate's overall lightly defended west bank of the Antietam was not maneuver designed to place his Corps in relative positional and fire power advantage over the enemy. In fact, his scheme of maneuver accomplished just the opposite.

The only thing which Burnside did right during the attack was to send General Rodman to the extreme right flank of the Confederate line in an attempt to envelop Toombs' brigade at the bridge. In this he was at least partially successful in that once Rodman's division forced Snavely's Ford Toombs decided to withdraw as noted in his official report, partly due to a lack of ammunition and mounting casualties, but mostly to the threat then emerging on his right.

Maneuver on the part of the Union divisions and brigade commanders was in accordance with Burnside's overall plan of attack—and that was apparently a continuation of the frontal assault. Consequently, at levels below corps the option of effective infantry maneuver (for positional advantage) was foreclosed by the corps commander's scheme. This does not discount the effective use of localized maneuver drills by both brigade and regimental commanders.



As for the Union artillery, Burnside deployed four batteries forward during the attack. Two remained behind but both of these (Benjamin and McMullen) were out of ammunition so they could not contribute long range fire support. Only Cook's battery on the Corps' right flank effectively maneuvered in its support of the attack.

In summary, an analysis of the actions on the Confederate right flank indicate that Lee and Longstreet made better use of maneuver than did McClellan or Burnside.

6. Unity of Command: "For every objective, insure unity of effort under a responsible commander."

This principle requires that all efforts are directed toward a common goal. Essential to unity of command is a clear understanding of the commanders intent and the corollary requirement to synchronize all aspects of the effort.

Perhaps the most obvious characteristic of the Confederate actions at Antietam was the unprecedented degree of unity of effort which they achieved throughout the battle. It was as if every leader had a clear understanding of what his immediate commander, if not also Lee, wanted in order to successfully prosecute the defense in their sector. Because the intent was understood subordinate commanders could make decisions on their own initiative thus taking advantage of fleeting windows of opportunity. The two most obvious examples of individual initiative being those exercised by Toombs when directing his brigade to counterattack the Union forces threatening Sharpsburg and Jenkins when redeploying his brigade to meet this same threat.

From the perspective of the Ninth Corps there seemed to be little evidence of unity of effort. This apparently started with Burnside's misunderstanding of the Ninth Corps time of attack and McClellan's intended role for the Corps in the overall Army scheme of attack. McClellan chastised Burnside officially in writing on the day following the battle for failing to attack quickly enough.

Burnside also exacerbated the situation early in the battle when he continued to act as an Army wing commander when, in fact, with the detachment of Hooker's corps on September 16, he only had his own Ninth Corps to command. Rather than reverting back to being the Ninth Corps commander, he continued to consider himself and act as a wing commander, a position no longer recognized by McClellan.

Burnside's persistence in this regard forced Brigadier General Jacob Cox to take over as acting commander of the Ninth Corps. This after Cox had, only two days prior to Antietam, taken command of the Kanawha Division which until that time had been commanded by Brigadier General Reno. However, Reno was killed during the Battle of South Mountain. This left Colonel Eliakim P. Scammon in command of the Kanawha Division. The upshot of Burnside's decision was that the tactical fight of the Ninth Corps was executed by General Cox, an officer who had yet to command a division. This also meant that the most experienced division in the Corps, the Kanawha, was commanded not by its second-in-command after General Reno but the third. Cox's opinions as to the impact of this decision are included here:

"In the afternoon I saw General Burnside, and learned from him that McClellan had determined to let Hooker make a movement on our extreme right to turn Lee's position. Burnside's manner in speaking of this implied that he thought it was done at Hooker's solicitation, and through his desire, openly evinced, to be independent in command. I urged Burnside to assume the immediate command of the corps and allow me to lead my own division. He objected that as he had been announced as commander of the right wing of the army, composed of the two corps, he was unwilling to waive his precedence or to assume that Hooker was detached for anything more than a temporary purpose. I pointed out that Reno's staff had been granted leave of absence to take the body of their chief to Washington, and that my division staff was too small for corps duty; but he met this by saying that he would use his staff for this purpose, and help me in every way he could till the crisis of the campaign should be over. Sympathizing with his very natural feeling, I ceased objecting, and accepted with as good grace as I could the unsatisfactory position of nominal commander of the corps to which I was a comparative stranger, and which, under the circumstances, naturally looked to him as its accustomed and real commander. Burnside's intentions in respect to myself were thoroughly friendly, as he afterward proved, and I had no ground for complaint on this score; but the position of second in command is always an awkward and anomalous one, and such I felt it."<sup>2</sup>

Cox's dilemma at Antietam was a very real one. His superior, General Burnside, placed him in command of a corps, an assignment which was in point of fact recognized neither by McClellan or the division commanders (other than Scammon) within the Ninth Corps. In reality, Burnside remained the corps commander in spite of his refusal to recognize that fact. In retrospect, given these confusing circumstances it is somewhat surprising that the Ninth Corps performed on the battlefield as well as it did.

Although none of the official reports comment on the command relationship of the two brigades of the Kanawha Division which, once across the Antietam, operated on different flanks of the Corps, it appears that they were essentially operating independently under Cox's direct control; e.g.; not under the specific control of the division commanders in their respective zones of

action. Colonel Scammon, who was the nominal commander of the division was operating in General Rodman's zone. Crook's brigade was on the right flank of the Corps in Willcox's zone. However, there is no indication in any of the reports that these brigades of the Kanawha Division were placed under the operational control of the divisional commanders having primary responsibility for those zones of action. Accordingly, such a broad span of control unnecessarily complicated battlefield command and control for Cox. From a unity of effort standpoint this arrangement could not have contributed to, but in fact probably detracted from, overall unity of effort. In my view, the Kanawha Division should have been fought as a division with its two brigades fighting in conjunction with one another. If they were to be split, each brigade should have been placed under the operational control of one of the two division commanders previously mentioned.

In summary, the two most significant actions which impacted adversely on the Ninth Corps unity of effort were Burnside's refusal to act as a Corps commander and the fragmentation of the Kanawha Division.

7. Security: "Never permit the enemy to gain an unexpected advantage."

Security is the essential element in protecting and preserving combat power. Security results from measures taken by commanders at all levels to protect their commands from surprise, detection, observation or compromise. Proper security minimizes unnecessary risk but does not suggest undue caution.

At the operational level both of the Army commanders or members of their command committed gross violations of security which adversely impacted on the potential for operational success.

In the case of the Army of Northern Virginia, the infamous loss of Order 191, Lee's operations order for the opening of the Maryland Campaign, completely compromised his plan. McClellan's failure to rapidly exploit his good fortune was the only thing that saved the Army of Northern Virginia from defeat in detail.

On the other hand, McClellan's failure to secure the battlefield from Confederate reinforcement was a major operational mistake. Knowing that the majority of Jackson's forces were marching from Harpers Ferry to reinforce Lee at Sharpsburg on the 16th, McClellan should have positioned a force between Harpers Ferry and Sharpsburg—an ideal mission for cavalry. It should be noted that Pleasanton's cavalry division remained uncommitted throughout the day immediately prior to the battle and the day of the battle itself. If McClellan had succeeded in delaying only A. P. Hill's light division, the battle for the Confederate right would undoubtedly have gone to the Ninth Corps. So, this fundamental failure to isolate the battlefield kept McClellan from achieving a decisive tactical victory which most assuredly would have had far reaching strategic consequences.

At the tactical level, the Ninth Corps violated the principle of security in at least three very basic and critical ways. First, Burnside failed to conduct a thorough reconnaissance of the Antietam within his zone of action. Consequently, he was unaware of the numerous fords across the creek which could have supported artillery caissons and limbers, not to mention supply

wagons. A detailed physical reconnaissance of the Antietam within the Ninth Corps' zone reveals at least five potential fording sites in addition to that at Snavely's. Perhaps the most critical reconnaissance oversight was the belief that the Antietam was unfordable to infantry. This was totally without foundation, but it resulted in Burnside's disastrous preoccupation with the bridge. Anyone who has walked along the Antietam in this area knows that a man could cross virtually at any point and never go into water that exceeded his waist in depth. Henry Kyd Douglas' remark cited previously in the tour at STOP ONE only substantiates this criticism.

Second, Burnside failed to secure his left flank once he had crossed the Antietam and before he began the attack toward Sharpsburg. It is unimportant whether this was his task as a Corps commander or McClellan's as the Army commander. The simple fact is that McClellan didn't assign the mission to any of his forces so it was Burnside's responsibility. Again, outposting for security or guarding an exposed flank is a cavalry mission and Burnside had sufficient cavalry in the Ninth Corps to perform such a mission. In fact, the Kanawha Division included two cavalry companies and one dragoon company. Units operating under Ninth Corps control, but unattached, included the Sixth New York Cavalry which was comprised of eight companies. Obviously, such a mobile force could have been used to great advantage along an axis from Snavely's Ford to the intersection of Miller's Saw Mill Road and the Harpers Ferry Road. If nothing else, the cavalry could have warned Harland's brigade of Hill's rapidly closing light division. Burnside's failure to take reasonable measures to secure his attacking brigades from a surprise counterattack on the corps flank was a catastrophic error.

Third, Burnside lost much of the security of his corps by the piecemeal application of available combat power and his lack of celerity in prosecuting the attack once across the Antietam. In the first instance, Burnside ultimately sacrificed more men by attempting to use minimal force to seize the bridge than if he had used the preponderance of his corps to cross en masse on a broad front. In the second, it should be pointed out that there is a great degree of security in speed itself. If Burnside had immediately continued the attack after seizing the west bank of the Antietam he would not only have saved two hours of unnecessarily lost time but he would have considerably reduced Lee's time to react. Unfortunately, for the Ninth Corps Lee was able to shift considerable artillery to Longstreet's sector in support of the defense. For example, at 1:00 p.m. there were only five artillery batteries in support of the Confederate right. At 4:20 p.m. there were 12 artillery batteries supporting the right. The current US Army combat imperative "move fast, strike hard, and finish rapidly," clearly suggests the inherent value speed and shock action have to the security of the force.

The Ninth Corps was not without at least one good example of the proper application of tactical security. Fairchild's brigade did move rapidly over extremely undulating terrain and as a result drove their attack to a point just east of the Harpers Ferry Road. His rapid advance and use of a covered route significantly impaired the ability of the Confederate artillery to attrite his force.

As for the Confederate forces on the right only one major criticism of their security measures can be made. They did not use entrenchments to protect themselves, except for Toombs' brigade at their initial position

overlooking the bridge. Consequently, the infantry was frequently exposed to enemy long range artillery. It can be argued, however, with some merit that Lee wanted a mobile defense and that he held his infantry in protected, defilade positions until they could be effectively employed to engage the enemy's advancing infantry formations. This simply does not stand up under close scrutiny for two reasons. Battle records indicate sizable losses from artillery while the soldiers were either laying or standing on the ground, reverse slope or otherwise. Also, when sent forward to counterattack the infantry almost invariably would seek cover behind stone walls or rail fences. Few would question that entrenchments prepared on the forward slopes and occupied as required would have offered significantly greater protection to the defender than walls or fences. Therefore, protection of their combat power was the greatest weakness exhibited by the Confederates on the right flank.

8. Surprise: "Astride the enemy at a time and/or manner for which he is unprepared."

Lee lost the operational opportunity for surprise with the compromise of Special Order 191.

McClellan lost the opportunity for operational surprise when he discovered the details of Lee's operational concept and failed to react with even a modicum of speed.

Tactically, Lee achieved little surprise except that realized by A. P. Hill's arrival at the critical time and place so as to crush the Ninth Corps attack on the Confederate right. This surprise was due more to Union incompetence and their security failure than good tactics by Lee.

The only tactical surprise enjoyed by Burnside and the Ninth Corps was Rodman's successful and reasonably rapid advance toward the North once Snively's Ford was located. Unfortunately for the Ninth Corps, Burnside did not exploit this modest surprise and success with a hard-hitting, prompt continuation of the attack to the west. Two hours were taken to get things sorted out on the west bank of the Antietam, thereby, obviating any advantage which initially may have been accrued by Rodman's successful maneuver against the Confederate extreme right flank.

9. Simplicity: "Prepare clear uncomplicated plans and clear concise orders to insure thorough understanding."

Of all the principles of war, simplicity, appears to have been the least violated of all, by both sides.

Lee's plan for defending at Sharpsburg relied heavily on reinforcing the most threatened portion of his line with forces from the least threatened. While he did divide his forces under the command of Jackson (the left) and Longstreet (the right) it was Lee himself who directed divisional and brigade reinforcements into the line. This was done not so much to overshadow his nominal "corps" commanders, but rather was a function of the paucity of units. Although his plan was simple, the execution of that plan, considering its heavy dependence on maneuver and precise synchronization to achieve maximum effect, was in many respects difficult if not complex. It was not uncommon

for division commanders to be thrown into the counterattack with no opportunity for even a cursory ground reconnaissance or tactical update; e.g., McLaws, Hood and A. P. Hill all were required to counterattack virtually from the march.

On the Union side it is also apparent that McClellan's plans were also simple, if not clear or understood by his subordinates. One cannot fault the premise of McClellan's plan which was to attack Lee's left first, then his right hoping that Lee would reinforce his left with forces from the right or center and, then, after diverting his attention on both flanks committing his reserve against the center to divide and destroy the two wings of Lee's army. As stated, the plan was simple and suited to the terrain and disposition of the enemy's force. But in execution the plan failed.

From the perspective of the Ninth Corps it must again be said that their plan was simple, if not tactically sound. Burnside's plan to attack to seize the bridge was totally uncomplicated. It was also totally devoid of any hint of the principles of mass, offensive, economy of force or security. And, for these reasons, no amount of simplicity could hope to carry the bridge.

Once across the bridge it is again unclear what Burnside ordered as the objective of the Ninth Corps. It is known that two divisions were arrayed on line (Rodman's and Willcox's) and Sturgis' division held in reserve above the bridge; and the two brigades of the Kanawha Division followed the attacks of Rodman and Willcox. But it is unclear from a review of the official reports specifically what their respective objectives were. This lack of clarity may not have been too important for the assaulting divisions, but for the brigades which followed them and Sturgis' Division in reserve clear and specific orders were essential if initiative was to be exercised and the momentum of the attack maintained.

Below division level on both sides one can only conclude that simplicity of orders was achieved not so much as a result of tactical prowess but rather the "battle drill" nature of combat and the "follow-me" nature of leadership at those levels; both of which contributed to simplicity.

#### LESSONS APPLICABLE TO MODERN WARFARE

A study of the Battle of Antietam provides a myriad of valuable lessons which have application to modern warfare. The analysis of the battle using the principles of war as discussed in the previous section provides the basis for these insights.

From an operational perspective, the following lessons can be extracted:

1. Operational objectives which are established when planning a campaign must be consistent with and contribute to strategic objectives.
2. Leaders must be willing to take significant operational risks to achieve significant results. Lee's decision to divide his force for the conduct of operations within Maryland clearly reflected his willingness to

take major risks. McClellan's caution and risk-avoidance led to his failure to attain a decisive tactical and perhaps strategic victory at Antietam.

3. Failures in operational security can have catastrophic consequences. The famous last order which provided General McClellan with Lee's complete order of battle and early operational intentions not only resulted in the failure of Lee's campaign plan, but, more significantly, destroyed any potential for Lee to attain the critical strategic objectives essential to the Southern cause.

4. Commanders must seize operational opportunities and once identified boldly move to exploit enemy vulnerabilities. McClellan's full knowledge of Lee's operational plans gave him an opportunity rarely available in warfare, but one which he failed to exploit. Consequently, his failure to follow the combat imperative "move fast, strike hard and finish rapidly," probably cost McClellan an operational and tactical victory over the Army of Northern Virginia. More importantly, his failure to maintain the operational initiative possibly delayed a strategic decision for at least two more years.

While the operational lessons associated with Antietam have relevance even today, the tactical lessons are no less significant. In this context, I will concentrate on those tactical lessons related to actions in the Ninth Corps zone of action and the Confederate defense on the right.

1. A thorough reconnaissance of the battlefield is essential to developing a sound scheme of maneuver or defense. General Lee and the Confederate commanders fully understood this tactical imperative; Major General Burnside did not.

2. Entrenched infantry, positioned on dominating terrain and supported by artillery can defend successfully against a significantly larger attacking force. Brigadier General Toomb's defense of the lower bridge with no more than 400 men against repeated assaults by the Ninth Corps, a force 30 times greater than his own clearly substantiates this lesson.

3. In contrast to the lesson discussed previously, it is essential for commanders to allocate sufficient space for attacking forces to maneuver in order to preclude the enemy from focusing his fires and effort at a single point. Burnside's total preoccupation with the bridge during the initial attacks by the Ninth Corps was an obvious failure to recognize the need to provide for greater maneuver space.

4. The practice of tactical economy of force enhances flexibility and facilitates the concentration of forces at critical points on the battlefield. D. R. Jones employment of Toomb's Brigade forward along the Antietam at the bridge permitted him to husband the remaining forces of his greatly understrength division along the critical highground south of Sharpsburg. Thus, he achieved an effective defense in depth while protecting and concentrating the bulk of his scarce infantry resources. From Lee's perspective, economy of force operations allowed him to fight a highly active, mobile defense—reinforcing threatened points along his defensive line and counterattacking to blunt Union penetrations and successes.

5. Protect against surprise. The fundamental tenet of tactical security was consistently violated by Union leaders. General Burnside's failure to employ his abundant cavalry forces on his left flank jeopardized his assault toward the highground south of Sharpsburg. As a consequence, A. P. Hill was provided an unimpaired approach against Burnside's left flank. This gross violation of tactical security ultimately cost the Army of the Potomac a tactical victory at Antietam.

6. Reinforce success. General Burnside's failure to immediately reinforce the success achieved by Fairchild's Brigade in the center of the Corps zone of action permitted the Confederate forces sufficient time to regroup and initiate a counterattack against the Ninth Corps left flank.

7. Leaders must position themselves to the front in order to make timely and wise tactical decisions. Confederate leaders, especially Lee, were always found near the critical point in the battle at the critical time. As a result, he was in a position to make timely decisions if not also to lend moral and psychological support to his subordinates. Burnside, on the other hand was never at the critical point at the critical time. Accordingly, the Ninth Corps lost valuable time in the decision making process, not to mention the adverse effect which Burnside's location must have had on his ability to orchestrate the Ninth Corps attack. One could reasonably posit that his failure to position himself to directly view the battlefield led to his failure to reinforce Fairchild's success.

8. Position your logistics to sustain the fight. Undoubtedly, wasted time more than any single factor cost Burnside tactical success at Antietam. The first and most evident illustration of this was Burnside's inability to rapidly secure the west bank of the Antietam once McClellan ordered the attack to be initiated. To further compound this inexcusable loss of precious time, not to mention men, Burnside then took two hours to resupply his forces once the far side of the Antietam was finally secured. It is obvious that Burnside had failed to anticipate the need to position his supply and ammunition trains well forward before he began the attack. But his failure to see the need for displacing them early once it became apparent that the bridge was not going to fall quickly and that ammunition was being expended at rapid rates was an oversight that ultimately gave A. P. Hill the margin of time necessary to complete his march from Harpers Ferry. Undoubtedly, if Burnside had been able to quickly resupply his depleted forces once across the Antietam, A. P. Hill's arrival at Sharpsburg would have come only after the Ninth Corps had seized the key terrain which blocked Lee's only route of egress from Sharpsburg.

Surely, there are numerous, other tactical lessons to be derived from a study of the third phase of the Battle of Antietam. I have selected the eight above as the most significant in regard to their application to modern warfare.

#### SUMMARY

Perhaps Bruce Catton, the noted Civil War historian, best summarized the actions during the third phase of the Battle of Antietam:



"This attack was like the others, late and utterly unco-ordinated. It was made by Burnside's corps, which contained four divisions, and these characteristically were sent into action one at a time. This offensive began after all the other offensives had ended, and although it was the weakest of them all it nearly succeeded, and if it had succeeded Lee would have lost his grip on the ford across the Potomac and his army would have been done for. But McClellan was late in ordering the attack, Burnside was slow to execute the order, and coordination was enforced by no one; and finally, well on in the afternoon, A. P. Hill's division came up after a hard seventeen-mile march from Harper's Ferry, and it drove Burnside's advance back almost to Antietam Creek and stabilized the situation. Hill's arrival highlighted one of the strange features of the battle. From the moment the two armies first confronted each other here, Lee had been given forty-eight hours to reassemble his scattered forces, and this last piece slipped into place just when it was most needed."<sup>3</sup>

As with the other phases of the battle at Antietam, the Ninth Corps attack was characterized by exceptional courage on the part of individual soldiers from both the North and South. While it has become an accepted practice to criticize the actions and decisions of the Union senior leadership, General McClellan as well as his Ninth Corps commander, certainly no one can question the bravery and courage of the individual Union soldiers. Bruce Catton had this to say about the fighting spirit of the soldiers at Antietam:

"This war saw many terrible battles, and to try to make a ranking of them is just to compare horrors, but it may be that the battle of Antietam was the worst of all. It had, at any rate, the fearful distinction of killing and wounding more Americans in one day than any other fight in the war. If there was any essential difference in the fighting qualities of Northern and Southern soldiers Antietam fails to show it. It was a headlong combat, unrelieved by any tactical brilliance, a slugging match in cornfields and woodlots and on the open slopes of the low hills that came up from the brown creek.

Neither commanding general did what he wanted to do; actually, once the fighting got under way neither commander had a great deal to do with it except to stand firm and refuse to call retreat, and in the end it was about as close to a draw as a large battle could be . . . except that it became the great turning point of the war, meaning more than either general or either army intended, a grim and fateful landmark in American history. American soldiers never fought harder than they did when they fought each other on September 17 on the outskirts of Sharpsburg."<sup>4</sup>

Following the war, General Longstreet wrote of his view of the soldiers' performance at Antietam:

"When, in mature judgment, the historian builds monuments of words for the leaders of the campaign in Maryland, there will be flowers left for the private soldiers, and for the private soldiers' graves."<sup>5</sup>

This battle, like so many others in the American Civil War, saw a number of personal tragedies that literally tore families apart. The incident cited below was related by General Longstreet in his book, From Manassas to Appamattox.

"One of those peculiarly painful personal experiences which are innumerable in war, but seldom get into print (save in fiction), came under my observation in this battle. Colonel H. W. Kingsbury, who was killed while gallantly leading the Eleventh Connecticut Regiment at the ford near the Burnside Bridge, was a brother-in-law of General D. R. Jones, who commanded the Confederates immediately opposing him. His taking-off was a severe blow to Jones, and one from which he never recovered. His health had not been strong for some time. He asked leave of absence shortly after this occurrence, and gradually but hopelessly sinking, in a few months passed over to the silent majority to join his fallen kinsman."<sup>6</sup>

The bloodshed, bravery and human tragedy which were witnessed at Antietam were not the factors which made it historically important. However, the fact that Antietam was the major turning point in the war made it a battle of tremendous strategic and historical significance. Lee not only had failed to

achieve any of his operational or strategic objectives which had been outlined prior to the Maryland campaign but he provided Lincoln with an opportunity to establish a moral basis for destroying the Southern rebellion,—“The Emancipation Proclamation.”

Longstreet had this to say about the historical import of Antietam:

“The full significance of Sharpsburg to the Federal authorities lay in the fact that they needed a victory on which to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which President Lincoln had prepared two months before and had held in abeyance under advice of members of his Cabinet until the Union arms should win a success. Although this battle was by no means so complete a victory as the President wished, and he was sorely vexed with General McClellan for not pushing it to completion, it was made the most of as a victory, and his Emancipation Proclamation was issued on the 22d of September, five days after the battle. This was one of the decisive political events of the war, and at once put the great struggle outwardly and openly upon the basis where it had before only rested by tacit and covert understanding. If the Southern army had been carefully held in hand, refreshed by easy marches and comfortable supplies, the proclamation could not have found its place in history.”<sup>7</sup>

More than any other phase of the Battle of Antietam, the attack by the Union Ninth Corps against the Confederate right had a greater potential and many more opportunities for success than the earlier and more publicized phases. It was characterized by actions on both sides which reinforced and violated accepted principles of warfare. Its terrain was varied and a challenge in many respects to both attacker and defender. It was a tactical engagement in which infantry and artillery maintained battlefield ascendancy for limited periods. It was above all an engagement in which timing and synchronization of effort became all important. In conclusion, the third phase of the battle at Antietam represents an opportunity to extrapolate contemporary combat imperatives from a study of the myriad lessons of a civil war battlefield.

## CHAPTER V

### ENDNOTES

1. George B. McClellan, McClellan's Own Story, (New York, Charles L. Webster and Company, 1887, p. 590.
2. Cox. pp. 304-305.
3. Catton, p. 456.
4. Ibid., p. 452.
5. Longstreet, p. 262.
6. Ibid., pp. 262-263.
7. Ibid., pp. 284-285.

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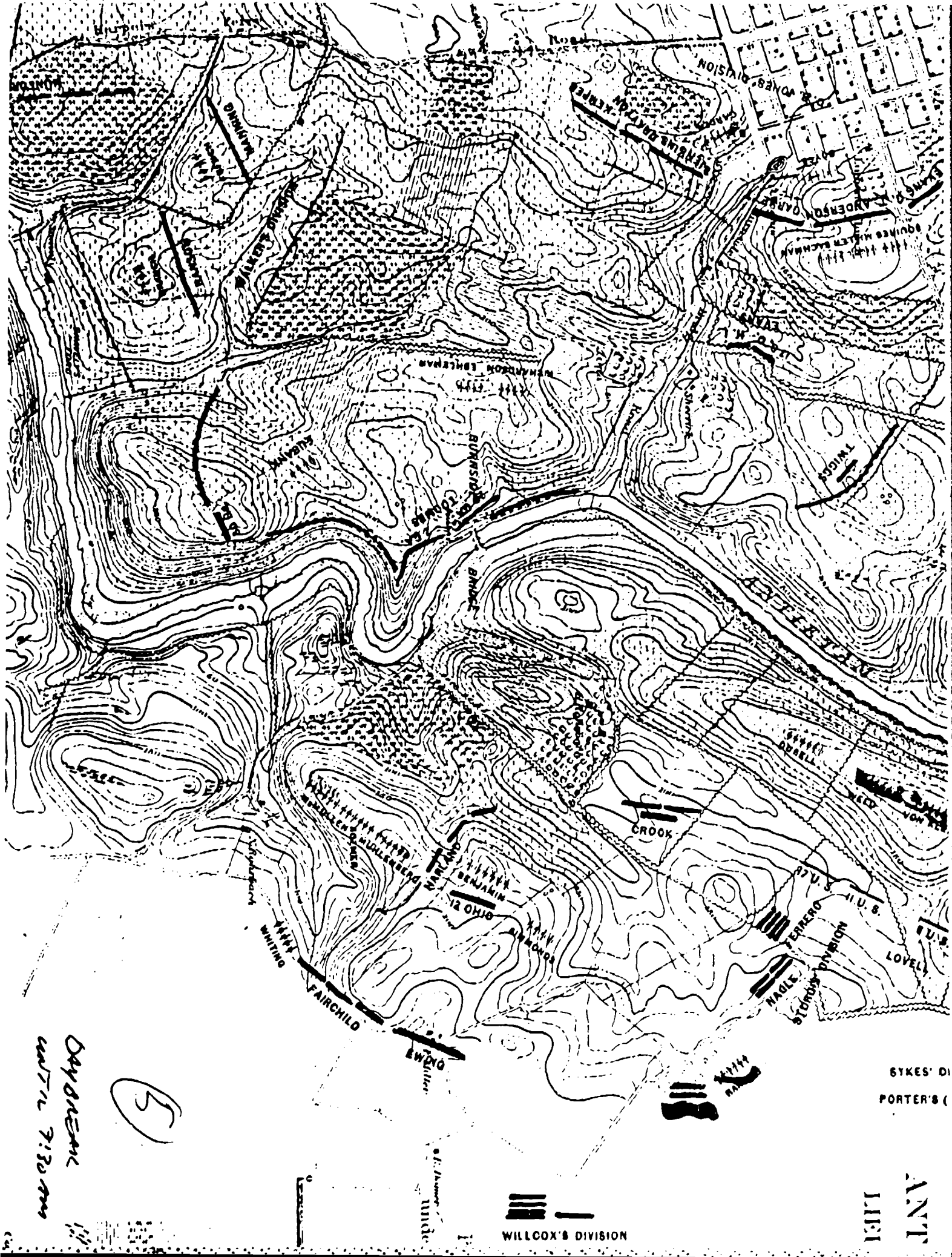
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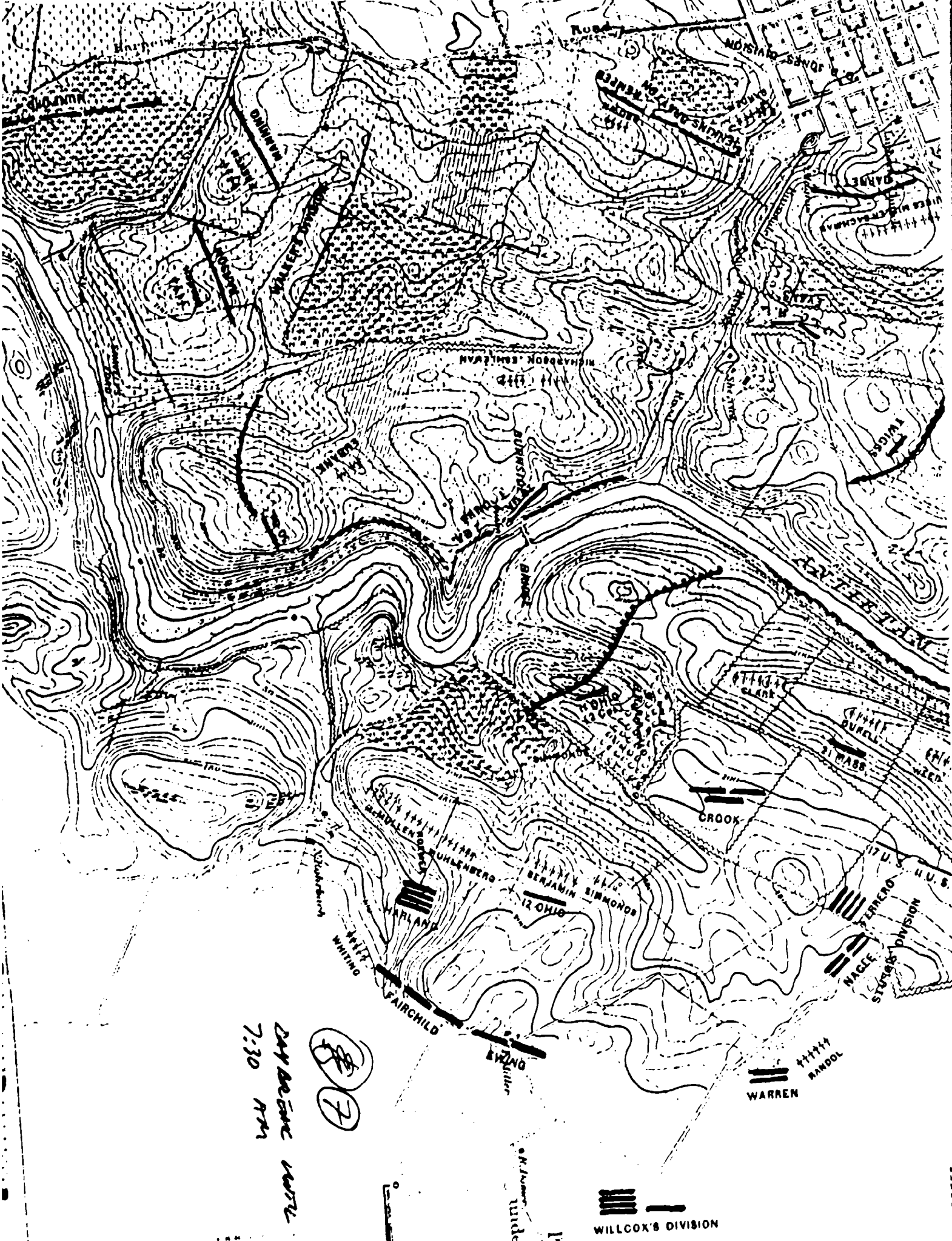
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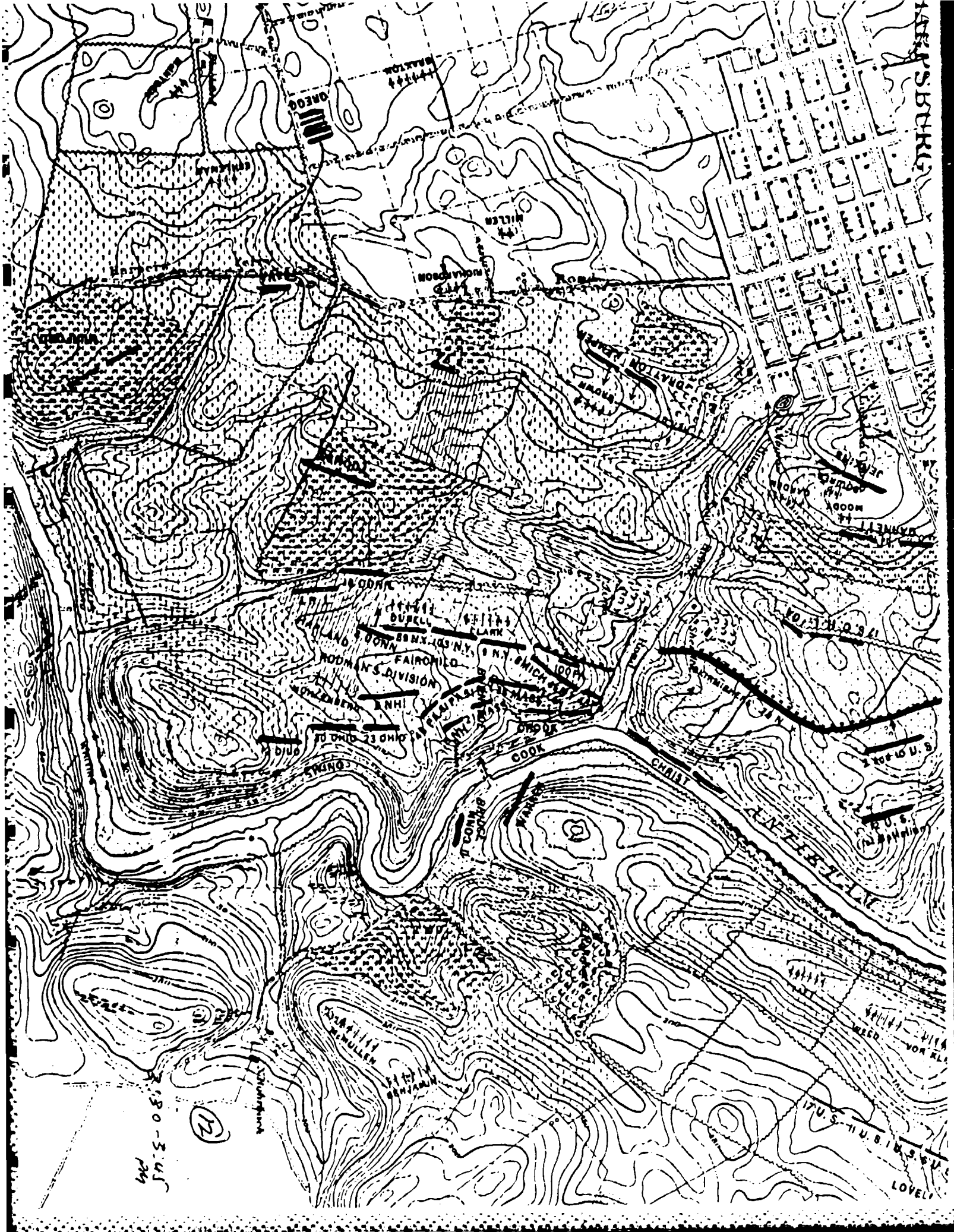




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